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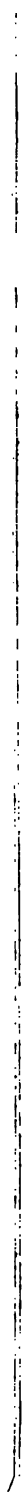
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TO

THE KING'S

MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

SIRE,

I **BEG** leave most humbly to
inscribe the following pages to **YOUR MA-**
JESTY, and to avail myself of this oppor-
tunity publicly to express my gratitude for
YOUR MAJESTY'S gracious protection, and
condescending kindness towards me.

I will only add, that the doctrine and principles contained in the present Volume, form the groundwork of those Discourses, which I have had the honour of delivering from time to time in the presence of YOUR MAJESTY.

I have the honour to be,

SIRE,

YOUR MAJESTY'S

Most dutiful Subject,

And sincerely devoted Servant,

CHARLES R. SUMNER.

WINDSOR,

April 15, 1824.

PREFACE.

It is the object of the following pages to examine a part of our Lord's mediatorial character, which seems to have attracted less attention than any other leading topic connected with his ministry.

The separation of that character into three distinct divisions, is at once the most scriptural, and the most comprehensive that can be followed.

The inspired description of the *priesthood* of Christ, which occupies the greater

part of the Epistle to the Hebrews, has been illustrated in all the branches of its sacrificial and intercessory duties, with a particularity which was due to its primary importance.

His *kingly office*, connected as it is with his divinity, and with all the subjects relating to the extent and nature of his spiritual empire, present and future, has also afforded materials for much practical as well as doctrinal remark.

Much improvement may likewise be derived from an attentive study of our Lord's *prophetical* character. In the view of that portion of it which has been attempted in this volume, it has formed no part of my design to inquire into the

terms of the divine revelation which he declared to the world. My aim has been to delineate the manner of his personal preaching—so far as a comparison of the Gospels will supply its outline—by a practical examination of some of the principal features of his ministerial character.



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THE
MINISTERIAL CHARACTER,
&c.

CHAPTER I.

The scope of Christ's prophetic Mission.

IN illustrating the character of Christ, as 'a teacher sent from God,' it must not be forgotten, that his office of prophet was subordinate to his office of priest. His object was not only to instruct by word and example, as those represent who deny the power of Satan over man¹, but to redeem;—not only to promulgate a law full of spirituality and life, but to 'put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' However properly we may exalt the purity of his doctrine—the sublimity of his discourses—the perfection of his moral precepts—we shall still be far from comprehending his real glory,

¹ See Milner's Church History, vol. iii. 345, 361.

while we contemplate him exclusively, or principally, as a lawgiver instead of a Saviour. The Son of God, as Macknight rightly observes², came from heaven, not to make the Gospel revelation, but *to be the subject of it*, by doing and suffering all that was necessary to procure the salvation of mankind.

Still such was the importance of this secondary object of our Lord's mission, that St. John, after having first proved his divine dignity, immediately proceeds to speak of him in language which refers to his character as the prophet of mankind. 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world³.' During the lapse of four thousand years truth had been corrupted in various ways; partly by philosophy, partly by tradition, partly by false, and partly by perverted views of what was excellent or holy; it was time for God to vindicate the knowledge

² Macknight on the Epistles, vol. i. 57.

³ John, i. 4, 9.

of himself, and by creating light, as it were, a second time, to illuminate the moral creation, which had long been covered by a darkness similar to that which at the beginning rested upon the face of the whole earth. Christ, therefore, claimed to be considered in the spiritual world, what the sun was in the natural, the source and centre of all light. 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'.

Other individuals, it is true, before the advent of our Lord, had communicated from time to time God's will to man; but he surpassed the most favoured of them as much in the unlimited degree of his knowledge as a prophet, as he exceeded them in nature and dignity as God. He was as great in his attribute of omniscience, as of omnipotence. Other prophets were sent for particular purposes, with limited and special messages: as Moses was

* John, viii. 12.

sent to the Israelitish nation, as Nathan to David, or Jonah to the Ninevites. But as Christ's mission extended universally over all the creation of God, and will know neither end nor limit, until all the kingdoms of the world shall acknowledge his empire, and all the dwellers upon earth shall become his people, so also was the character of his revelation adapted to the universal wants of all mankind, and commensurate with the utmost stretch of the human faculties. For 'in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge⁵.' This, therefore, is one of the points on which Owen insists, when it is his object to prove Christ's ability to save to the uttermost them that come to God through him. 'As a prophet, he did not receive this or that particular revelation from God; but all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were laid up in him, and he knew the whole mind and counsel of God, as coming forth from his divine bosom⁶.'

⁵ Col. ii. 3.

⁶ Owen on the Hebrews, vol. v. 549.

The only direct prediction of the Messiah, under the character of a prophet, occurs in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. *The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.*

But besides this passage, in which the Jews were taught to apply to the deliverer of Israel the express title of prophet, there are several other texts which allude to the manner in which that prophet should discharge his office. Such are the following: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the

Lord.' 'Behold my servant whom I uphold ; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him ; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.' ' I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles ; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.' ' The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ; because the Lord God hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek ; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God '.

Again, there is another class of texts which have a metaphorical allusion to our Lord's prophetic office.

⁷ Is. xi. 1, 2 ; xlii. 1, 6, 7 ; lxi. 1, 2.

1. Where he is spoken of as *a messenger or apostle*. 'The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even *the messenger of the covenant*, whom ye delight in⁸.' The church is told by Zechariah, that they should acknowledge the Messiah as the legate of God — 'Ye shall know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me⁹.' Accordingly, when Christ came, he appealed to a convincing testimony in favour of his pretensions. 'I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that *the Father hath sent me*.' He alleges the same authority for delegating a similar commission to his own apostles. '*As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you*.' And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the title of messenger is directly applied to him in conjunction with his sacerdotal character. 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider the Apo-*

⁸ Mal. iii. 1.⁹ Zech. ii. 9.

stle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus'.

2. Where he is spoken of *as a shepherd*. 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.' 'I will set up my shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant, David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.' 'David, my servant, shall be king over them, and they all shall have one shepherd'.¹ This character, also, is both claimed for himself by our Lord, and ascribed to him by the apostle. 'I am the good shepherd, and other sheep I have which are not of this fold: these also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.' 'Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the shepherd and bishop of your souls.' 'Now the God of heaven, that brought again from the dead that great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the blood of the everlast-

¹ John, v. 36; xx. 21; Heb. iii. 1.

² Is. xl. 11; Ezek. xxxiv. 23; xxxvii. 24.

ing covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will³.

3. Where he is spoken of *as a counsellor*. 'His name shall be called, Counsellor.' 'He shall be a priest upon his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both⁴.'

4. Where he is spoken of *as a light*. 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.' 'I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.' 'Arise! shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.' 'Unto you that fear my

³ John, x. 14, 16; 1 Pet. ii. 25; Heb. xiii. 20.

⁴ Is. ix. 6; Zech. vi. 13.

name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings ⁵.'

Now, from this series of texts, it appears that it was predicted of the scope of our Lord's prophetic mission, that he should be a messenger who would reveal, unreservedly, the whole will of God, and his laws for the government of men in general, as Moses did with regard to the more limited purpose and period for which God employed him—that this revelation would be complete, and consequently final, for 'last of all he sent his son'—and that as for those who would not acknowledge his authority, or receive his father's word from his mouth, God would require it at their hands.

The next step, therefore, is to inquire how far the conditions of the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus.

I. We have, first, Christ's own testimony to the fulfilment, in his own person, of the pre-

⁵ Is. ix. 2; xlix. 6; lxi. 1—3; Mal. iv. 2.

dictions relating to the prophet who should come. On his first appearance in the synagogue of his own town Nazareth, he read the passage which has been already quoted from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, wherein the prophet describes the appointment of the Messiah to preach the Gospel, and he then proceeded to apply it to himself in the most explicit terms ⁶. ‘*This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*’ This occurrence took place at the beginning of his ministry, so that he was inducted into it, as it were, with a regular declaration of the authority under which he acted as a teacher, and of the nature of the commission which, in virtue of that authority, he was about to open. When he had nearly arrived at the end of his ministry, after speaking of himself as the light of the world and the shepherd of the flock, two of the images under which his own prophetic character had been represented many ages before, he again urges the validity of his pretensions; and appeals to the notoriety of his miracles, as an ad-

⁶ Luke, iv. 16—21.

ditional motive for belief, which had fallen within the knowledge of the whole nation since he formerly claimed attention as a divine teacher. 'Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.'

II. We have John the Baptist's testimony to the same fact. After his disciples had complained to him of the success of Christ's ministry, he rejoices in witnessing this consummation of the glory which he had himself foretold. 'Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him,—this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled For he, whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him ⁸.' Nor is the weight of this testimony invalidated by the apparent doubt

⁷ John, x. 24, 25.

⁸ John, iii. 28—34.

conveyed in his message to Jesus—‘Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?’ Benson⁹ has explained the difficulty, by bringing forward again the solution originally given of it by the author of the questions which stand among the works of Justin Martyr. It will be observed, that the Evangelist expressly directs attention to the situation of John at the time the question was proposed. ‘John *had heard in the prison* the works of Christ.’ In confinement, therefore, he had no means of ascertaining personally the truth of the reports which had reached him, respecting the life of a certain extraordinary personage lately said to have appeared in Judea. Had any works of a miraculous nature really been wrought? If so, had they been wrought by that very Jesus whom he had himself baptized, and whom he had heard acknowledged by a voice from heaven? To clear up these doubts, and to ascertain the identity of the person whose fame had given rise to them, he sent two

⁹ Hulsean Lectures for 1820. Discourse iii.

¹ Matt. xi. 2.

of his disciples to make the necessary inquiries, and report accordingly. 'They came,' says Benson, 'they saw, they heard, they believed, and then returned with the glad tidings of certainty to their master. And he also heard, and he also believed. His uncertainty was built upon just and reasonable grounds. It was the result of a want of confidence, either in those who bore witness to the miracles of Jesus, or in the identity of the person by whom they were performed. When that want of confidence was once removed, the effect ceased with the cause, and he became thoroughly convinced. For Scripture often speaks to us as positively by its silence, as its assertions; and in the future pages of the Evangelist we meet with no other symptom whatever of the Baptist's doubt.'

III. Again, we have the testimony of the apostles and disciples. 'Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses, in the Law and the Prophets, did write: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' The two disciples going to Emmaus

were conversing 'concerning Jesus of Nazareth, *which was a prophet*, mighty in deed and word, before God and all the people.' 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider the Apostle and High Priest* of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house ?'*

IV. Lastly, we have the testimony of the people—an evidence of unspeakable value, because it proceeded from reluctant witnesses, who stood convicted of wilful unbelief by the very admissions which acknowledged the Messiah's prophetic character. 'Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.' 'Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the prophet.' 'This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, of Galilee.' And again, after the miracle at Nain, with an immediate

* John, i. 45; Luke, xxiv. 19; Heb. iii. 1, 2.

reference to the prediction of Moses, 'They glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us ³.' These admissions are so unqualified, that it would appear as if the convictions on which they were founded could not have again yielded to the persuasions of scepticism or prejudice. But it unfortunately happens, that one of the most painful, and, at the same time, one of the most undeniable internal evidences of the corruption of human nature, is to be found in the inconsistencies and contradictions which the conduct of mankind exhibits. Were we to open the Bible for the first time, and to read the decisive testimony borne in these passages to the prophetic character of our Lord, we should scarcely admit that it could proceed from the same people who so soon cried out against the same individual, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' What, we should ask, with something of the same astonishment which seems to have filled the mind of Pilate when he presided in judgement against him, would they crucify their prophet?

³ John, vi. 14; vii. 40; Matt. xxi. 11; Luke, vii. 16.

Such, however, is the certain, though humiliating conclusion to which Scripture leads us. Christ 'came unto his own, and his own received him not.'

That a whole generation of Jews should have remained insensible to the force of a series of predictions successively delivered by prophets of their own religion and country, preserved among their own records, and implanted in their minds from childhood, as one of the points of their habitual belief—predictions, finally, which were all explicitly and satisfactorily fulfilled in the person of Jesus—is so extraordinary an instance of national delusion, that not even the previous course of disobedience which the whole of their history exhibits could have prepared us to expect it. Moses had truly said, in the bitterness of his disappointment, after forty years experience of their manners, 'Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you;—and the fifteen centuries which intervened before our Lord's death, proved that the reproach which the fathers had

deserved continued to be applicable to the children of the latest generation ⁴. Unhappily the taint of unbelief seems to remain hereditary and inveterate in the Israelitish character; and did we not know from Scripture, that God, who has broken off the branches, is able to graff them in again, and that he who is faithful has held out to the church a promise of their ultimate salvation ⁵, we might be led to conclude that the measure of their iniquities was full, and that Jehovah had finally cast them away from his favour for ever.

Again, when we consider the number and clearness of the texts referring to the subject, it appears not a little remarkable, that there should have been no general expectation among the Jews, that our Lord would come in the character of a prophet and teacher. They looked for him as a king, as a conqueror, as a deliverer from captivity, as a judge,—but not as the prophet like unto Moses ⁶. They looked for

⁴ Deut. ix. 24.

⁵ Rom. xi. 17—27.

⁶ Benson (*Life of Christ*, p. 288.) says, that both Jews

some one to appear under that form previously to Christ's advent; but there was no distinct understanding that he himself would sustain the prophetical office. The Samaritans, who admitted only the Pentateuch into the canon of their sacred books, and who consequently had only one prediction relating to our Lord under that character, yet had more correct notions of his commission, than those who had not only Moses, but the prophets, to enlighten them. 'I know,' said the woman of that nation to Jesus, 'that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: *when he is come he will tell us all things.*' And in her subsequent description of him to the men of her city, she styles him the man which told her all things that ever she did, whence she inferred that he must be the Christ⁷.

and Samaritans expected the Messiah under the character of an extraordinary prophet, as well as of a great king; and in support of his assertion, quotes John, iv. 25, 26, 29, 42; and vi. 14, 15; and xii. 13; Matt. xxi. 11; Luke xxiv. 19, 21. But it will be seen, on reference to the passages, that not one of these texts affords any foundation for his opinion. There is no doubt that the Jews expected a prophet; but it does not appear from any thing in Scripture that they expected that prophet would be the Christ.

⁷ John, iv. 26—29.

Yet although it was known unto God from the beginning, that his own people would afford an awful specimen of the hardness of heart which accompanies apostacy from the truth, the scope of our Lord's personal ministry was confined exclusively to the Jews. 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel⁸.' His apostles were expressly enjoined to proclaim the approach of the kingdom of heaven amongst their countrymen only; and lest their zeal for the salvation of others should surmount the persuasion, which they shared in common with the rest of their brethren, that the children of Abraham alone were heirs of the promise,—the limits of their commission were strictly confined to the boundaries of Judea by a special order. 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not⁹.' St. Paul accordingly styles our Lord 'a minister of the circumcision,' and declares to the unbelieving Jews at Antioch, that 'it was necessary that the Gospel should first have been preached unto them¹.'

⁸ Matt. xiv. 24.

⁹ Matt. x. 5.

¹ Rom. xv. 8; Acts, xiii. 46.

In fulfilling the divine decrees on this subject, our Lord was exposed to a trial of patience which it is impossible that any other being should ever be called to undergo. Hope is the great moving principle which gives life and energy to all our actions. Were we sure beforehand that all our efforts to promote any given object would be unavailing, that our words would be always listened to with indifference, or our actions always thwarted by some overruling prejudice, few among us would have sufficient steadiness of purpose to persevere long against the certainty of disappointment, or to maintain an unavailing struggle in a cause that was foreseen from the beginning to be hopeless. Among many discouragements which the ordinary labourers in the spiritual vineyard are destined to encounter, an occasional blessing from above on their industry is the charm which sweetens the task, and gives a fresh impulse to renewed exertions in the prosecution of their duty. But so far from being sustained by witnessing the acceptableness of his ministry, our Lord was perfectly aware, before he entered on it, that as

a prophet he should receive no honour in his own country. He knew the inveteracy, the extent, the insuperable nature of the opposition he should meet with; yet with all this foreknowledge of the universal rejection which awaited him by the people of his peculiar adoption, he announces to them the proffered terms of reconciliation with God, as if the whole that was to happen when his hour was come had never been revealed to his view. He foresaw that the good seed which he was scattering would not be immediately fruitful; and that although others hereafter might reap the spiritual harvest on ground which he had first broken up, yet that the generation to which he personally addressed himself would be stained with a crime, in comparison of which all that their fathers had committed was light in the balance. He foresaw that his blood would lie on them and on their children, as a kind of national curse imprecated by themselves on their own heads. Yet he set his face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, and laboured as patiently among them, as if they were destined to be his crown

of rejoicing, and the blessed sons of his adoption. He offered them to the last with unshaken faithfulness all the privileges of redemption, and bequeathed to them by his long suffering and gracious endurance the awful responsibility of a deliberate rejection of salvation.

At the same time, though our Saviour was statedly the prophet of the Jews, yet he gave occasional pledges to the Gentiles, of the mercy hereafter designed for them. Thus he declared his Messiahship to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, and abode two days in her city, contrary to his apparent intention; so that 'many more believed, because of his own word³.' So too, when certain Greeks desired to see him, he delivered a very remarkable hint, that the time was now at hand when all the ends of the world would be brought within the pale of salvation⁴. Thus was witnessed in his ministry the literal fulfilment of the words of

³ John, iv. 41.

⁴ John, xii. 20—23.

Jeremiah, 'They shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest;' and of those of Isaiah, referred to by our Lord himself—'All thy children shall be taught of the Lord'.⁵ And, however proper it may be to explain these texts in a secondary sense of the divine influences exerted upon the minds of men, and the motions of the Holy Spirit, yet our Lord's own quotation of the words, when representing himself as the bread of life, seems to make it necessary to refer them to him in the first instance.

Having thus examined the predicted character of Christ as a prophet, and the manner in which the conditions of that character were actually fulfilled in our Lord's person, it remains that the objects of his prophetic mission should be briefly examined.

The several revelations which have been vouchsafed to mankind, have always been

⁵ Jer. xxxi. 34. Is. liv. 13, compared with John, vi. 45.

adapted in a manner worthy of the divine wisdom to the particular wants of the times at which they were delivered. Under the patriarchal dispensation the promise of some one who should hereafter bruise the serpent's head, was necessary in order to support man in his fallen state, and to save him from irrecoverable despair. Hence the promise of a future Redeemer, which formed the subject of the first revelation, was from time to time confirmed and enlarged, to the unspeakable comfort of Abraham and his descendants. Under the Mosaic dispensation the knowledge of one God was needful to preserve a nation surrounded by idolaters from polytheism ; and a system of temporal rewards and punishments was wanted to supply the place of any distinct communication respecting a future state. Accordingly the Israelites were told, that the Lord their God was one God, and a code of laws was enacted, to which they were required to pay implicit attention, on pain of penal inflictions, in case of disobedience.

But when Christ came to the Jews, he found them resting in a formal observance of the ritual law, and possessed with a belief of their federal title to exclusive salvation. Accordingly, the eventual object of his ministry, doctrinally considered, was the removal of these two errors. At the same time it was far from being his purpose to give a complete developement of Christian truth, during his personal ministry; and in particular one of the two doctrines just stated was only obscurely alluded to by himself, and was left to be more fully explained by the preachers who followed him. 'These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things.' 'When he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth'. Agreeably to this design, the manner of his teaching was rather declarative than expository, rather to lay down general outlines, than a perfect and fully finished

⁶ John, xiv. 25, 26. xvi. 13.

system. St. Mark's first description of it is very characteristic of his summary mode of preaching throughout the whole of his ministry, — 'Jesus came into Galilee, preaching (*κηρύσσων*, *proclaiming*) the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel'.⁷ His lessons, says Paley⁸, did not consist of disquisitions; of any thing like moral essays, or like sermons, or like set treatises upon the several points which he mentioned. When he delivered a precept, it was seldom that he added any proof or argument; still more seldom that he accompanied it with, what all precepts require, limitations, and distinctions. His instructions were conceived in short emphatic sententious rules, in occasional reflections, or in round maxims.

In fact, so much did our Saviour leave to be explained and applied by the apostles, that infidel writers have taken occasion from thence to

⁷ Mark, i. 14, 15.

⁸ Evidences, ii. 49.

accuse St. Paul of having preached another Gospel. And as if to prove how secondary was his prophetic office in comparison of his priestly character, notwithstanding he was sent exclusively to the Jews, he preached little at Jerusalem, and seldom went thither, except when called to the celebration of the great feasts. He was more free in his communications in the single discourse with the Samaritan woman, than in all his discourses with his own countrymen during the whole of his ministry.

Since, then, Christ did not come as a prophet to explain fully his own dispensation, much less did he come into the world to condemn the world⁹. He was not yet invested with any judicial character; and therefore when the Scribes and Pharisees brought before him an offender for judgement, he declined interfering with functions which, by their own law, belonged to the civil magistrate. He came rather to magnify the patience and long-suffering of God in awaken-

⁹ John, iii. 17. xii. 47.

ing sinners, and calling them to repentance, than to anticipate the season of punishment by an immediate sentence which, even had it been demanded from the purest motives, would have been contrary to the analogy of the divine judgments. There were many reasons which justified the wisdom of Providence in suffering the tares to grow together with the wheat until the harvest.

A part of the object of Christ's mission unquestionably was to fulfil the law and the prophets. 'Think ye not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' Now, in proportion as the Jews had departed from the spirit of their law, it is evident that they would oppose themselves the more strongly to a declaration of our Saviour, which had the effect of condemning the whole of their doctrine and practice. If they had not understood that the law was intended as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, and

only designed from the beginning to serve for a preparatory dispensation, as a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, they would listen with impatience to a teacher who annulled all distinctions of meats and persons, who abrogated ceremonies and long-established rites, and who even robbed their temple of the honour of being the exclusive seat of the national worship, a privilege which it had enjoyed from the period of its dedication. It happened, therefore, that notwithstanding the pains taken by our Lord to remove from their minds any ungrounded prejudice concerning the design of his mission, which might obstruct their belief, there was nothing that gave them more umbrage, or to which they more frequently objected, than to the interference of the principles of the new system, with the persuasions they had adopted under the authority of the old ².

² Tillotson has been at some pains to show the unreasonableness of the conduct of the Jews, by instituting a comparison between the Jewish and Christian dispensations, wherein he follows the argument of the Apostle to the Hebrews,

But the special advantage which the world derived from the teaching of Christ, an advantage exclusively communicable by him who was *one with the Father*, was the declaration of the divine will conveyed through his medium. 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.' 'All things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.' 'He that sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things that I have heard of him ³.'

It is observable, that on this ground alone did Christ himself condescend to account for his qualifications to be a public instructor. In reply to the astonishment expressed by the Jews at his teaching, which led them to ask, 'How knoweth this man letters' (or, 'learning,' as it is rendered in the margin),

and demonstrates how admirably the religion of Christ was calculated to supply the peculiar defects and imperfections of the law of Moses. Heb. viii. 7—10. Tillotson's Works, vol. v. Sermons, 104 and 105.

³ John, i. 18. xv. 15. viii. 26.

‘having never learned:’ he told them plainly, that his doctrine was not his own, but his who sent him ⁴. He took upon himself openly and in his own person that character which he had hitherto sustained through the medium of others. For as in Melchisedec was represented his everlasting priesthood, so in the series of divine revelations communicated in different ages to holy men of God, was also indirectly displayed the everlasting nature of his prophetic office. In all the appearances of Jehovah to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and the succeeding prophets, it was still Christ who was the declarer of the heavenly will, and through whom every manifestation of it was conveyed. ‘Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time the *spirit of Christ which was in them*, did signify ⁵.’

⁴ John, vii. 15, 16.

⁵ 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

It is true, that the heavens are telling the glory of God, and that the firmament sheweth his handy work ; but of those things which constitute the surpassing excellence of his glory, the glory of his long-suffering in spite of provocations, the glory of his faithfulness to his promises, the glory of his mercy in the gracious scheme devised for the reconciliation of fallen man, the glory of his justice in the satisfaction made by a vicarious sacrifice for sin, the glory of his love in proffering not pardon only, but the blessings of an eternal kingdom to his redeemed inheritance,—of whatever, in short, is comprised under the term of the great mystery of the Gospel,—the world would have remained in utter ignorance, unless the great priest of the church had also condescended to become its prophet. The works of creation, and the external fabric of the world, wise and wonderful and glorious as they are, could never have adequately proclaimed the moral attributes of his Father ; so that men could never have been acquainted with their nature but by revelation, and even in this accommodated sense of the

words it may be truly said, 'No man cometh to the Father but by him'. They could have known something of his greatness and majesty and power,—but would have had no clue to lead them to comprehend the height and depth of his goodness, or the extent of his love to man. They would have known that it must have been an almighty wisdom which called them into life, and upheld by sovereign laws the organized world which they inhabit,—but they could not have learnt with the same certainty that the happiness of his creatures was so dear to the Creator, that he spared not his own Son in their behalf. Without the interference of our Lord, the sons of men would have been still, as we have seen them among the wisest and most civilized nations of antiquity, erecting an altar to the unknown God, alienated from spiritual religion, and vainly seeking for some vital principle of holiness which the light of nature appears insufficient to supply. 'To this end,' said he to Pilate, 'was I born, and for this cause

* John, xiv. 6.

came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth⁷.'

Nothing less than an omniscience of the whole will of God could have qualified our Saviour for the due discharge of this office. Moses, the greatest of the prophets who preceded him, was not endowed with any perpetual gift of inspiration, authorizing him to speak at all times in the name of God according to the necessity of the moment. He had no such comprehensive knowledge of the universal will of Jehovah on every subject as would empower him to dispense with consulting in the appointed way, and waiting for particular answers to the information required.

But *the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him*, for so the Apostle marks the peculiarity of the heavenly message announced through the ministry of our Saviour, was very different. As 'in all things he was to

⁷ John, xviii. 37.

have the pre-eminence,' he came with such full powers, that by reason of his intimate union with the Father, and perfect sympathy with his designs, God may be said to speak to us in him face to face. Whilst he was a child, the Evangelist bears him witness that he was 'filled with wisdom,' which 'increased' as he increased in years; so that at the commencement of his ministry it was testified of him that he was 'full of the Holy Ghost ⁸.' Instead, therefore, of that radiance which once shone on the face of Moses, after his interview with the Most High, instead of those transient moments of inspiration, wherein 'holy men, of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,' as *servants in the house*⁹ partially acquainted with temporary prospects of their Master's will, there was spread around the head of Christ a crown of perpetual illumination; so that the Spirit of God which lighted on him at his baptism, abode with him continually, and in him, as in an inexhaustible storehouse of truth, were 'hidden

⁸ Luke, ii. 40. ⁹ Heb. iii. 4.

all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'
 And thus it was foretold of him by Isaiah²:—
*The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the
 spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of
 counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and
 of the fear of the Lord.*

It would seem analogous to the order of the divine counsels, that as Christ speaking by the prophets was the original declarer of the will of God from the beginning, and as he afterwards became in his own person the direct medium of communication, he should not leave his work imperfect, but should continue to sustain his office of teacher so long as the world stood in need of his heavenly aid.

The reasonableness of such an expectation stands confirmed by the testimony of Scripture. 'As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my spirit which is upon thee, and my words which I have

¹ Col. ii. 3.

² Is. xi. 2.

put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.' 'Lo,' said our Lord to his disciples, as his parting assurance, 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world³;' not only to the termination of their own natural lives, but with their successors in the Christian church, through endless generations, in their studies and labours, whether public or private, for the extension of his spiritual kingdom. In the strength and comfort of this gracious assurance may the ministers of his word go forth unto their work, in the full confidence that though they be as it were *earthen vessels*, he will be glorified in their weakness, and will perfect praise out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings. And it is this promise which will be their sufficient support in the execution of their difficult office, wherever their lot may be cast—whether they are commissioned to bear the name of their

³ Is. lix. 21. Matt. xxviii. 20.

Master into lands which have not yet heard the joyful sounds of salvation, or amongst the Jews who have despised and rejected their prophet, or whether they are placed among Christian nations to stir them up to faithfulness, and to remind them of the duties of their calling. He will be with them, and will 'remember his word unto his servants⁴,' even unto the end of the world. 'The fathers' of the church, 'where are they; and the prophets, do they live for ever?' or, as the Jews themselves observed, 'Abraham is dead, and the prophets;' but the Lord 'ever liveth' to complete his victory over Satan, and to work by the servants whom he employs ministerially to act in his name and authority⁵.

The practical reflections suggested to the mind after dwelling on this subject, are of very general application. There is no view of our Lord's character which is not fraught with valuable instruction, and, like his own word, he

⁴ Ps. cxix. 49.

⁵ Zech. v. 8. John, viii. 52.

may be alternately exhibited for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

1. The distinctive character of Christ in his prophetical office was *faithfulness*.

The Jews needed no argument to convince them that Moses had been faithful, of whom it was written that ‘according to all that God appointed him, so did he,’ and whose praise from the lips of God himself was in all the churches—‘My servant Moses is faithful in all his house⁶.’ Accordingly the Apostle avails himself of their reverence for the law-giver of the old covenant, in order to exalt Christ in their eyes, and to represent to them the perfections of the prophet of the new dispensation, *who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house⁷*.

⁶ Exod. xl. 16. Numb. xii. 7.

⁷ Heb. iii. 2.

Our Saviour gave an early promise of this devotedness to his calling in the remarkable answer to his mother — ‘Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business.’ Throughout his course his zeal in the exercise of his ministerial functions was unwearied; and in the synagogue or abroad, he was always found acting consistently with the character he assumed. He hungered more to do the will of him that sent him and to finish his work, than to satisfy the wants of the body, to which as man in the infirmity of the flesh he was subject even as ourselves. When ‘wearied with his journey,’ and in want of seasonable refreshment, he yet entered with all his usual energy into his office of teacher, and laboured to dispel the misapprehensions which darkened the understanding of the woman that talked with him⁸. This is a height of excellence to which man cannot soar, but it may be contemplated as a standard of imitation, and sought after with prayer to him who will proportion his strength to our weak-

⁸ John, iv. 6.

ness. And though the ministers of his ordinances cannot look for that high witness which Moses obtained, or hope to be accounted faithful *in all their house*, yet they may by God's grace so approve themselves as diligent dispensers of his word and sacraments, as finally to hear from their master and pattern that gracious eulogy—' Well done, ye good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.'

2. When Christ is considered as an Apostle, it obviously occurs to the mind, that in the person of the messenger we see in some measure the very lineaments and moral representation of the almighty power from whom he was sent. The nature of the divinity itself to a certain extent stands revealed to our view; and though no man hath seen the Father at any time, yet through the medium of the Son, as just an idea is formed of the unapproachable Godhead as the understanding of man can receive.

In the conduct of human affairs an ambassador invested with authority to transact the

business of his principal, carries with him in his whole behaviour a deportment agreeable to the instructions of his superior ; he speaks in the language, and adopts the general character of the power whom he is commissioned to represent. We collect without difficulty from the pacific or warlike tone of his demeanour, whether the intentions of the party for whom he appears are conceived in a friendly or a hostile spirit.

Just such an ambassador is Christ between heaven and earth. We may gain a knowledge of the manner in which God regards mankind, from the character of him whom he sent from his bosom to propose terms of reconciliation to them. Under the old dispensation he appeared to the world as a jealous God,—unapproachable by mortal presence,—shrouded in the semblance of a burning fire, and encompassed with the terrors of the storm and whirlwind,—whom none could see or hear, and live. But seen through the medium of Jesus, God is contemplated under a new character. He is no longer an avenging judge, exacting the penal-

ties of the law, and demanding satisfaction for his offended justice ; but a Father reconciled by an expiatory sacrifice of his own appointment, looking complacently on the renewed nature of his once lost children, and sending them through his son a message of pardon and love. Former revelations had unfolded much of the majesty and grandeur and awfulness of God ; but the declaration made of him by Christ is one which, while it detracts nothing from his sublimity and power, invests him at the same time with all the gentler attributes of tenderness and mercy. Through the Apostle who has now again passed into the heavens, after discharging his appointed ministry, the characteristics of the divinity assume a new aspect ; we see expressed in every trait of Christ's human nature compassion and long-suffering and love unspeakable ; and we transfer in our reflections all these endearing qualities to that Father of whom the Son is pronounced to be the express image. Instead of the rod and the sword of his wrath, the cross is lifted up in token of redemption and salvation. Instead of a sentence of universal punishment,

inasmuch as all have come short of the glory of God, instead of that terrible reckoning for sin which awaited every inmate of a fallen world, we hear the Almighty speaking once again in terms of favour to his creatures—we receive from his lips an assurance of peace on earth and good will towards men,—and we look forward with confidence to the gracious pledge, that he who spared not his own son will also with him freely give us all things.

3. If Christ condescended to teach, that he might give his own sanction and authority to the dispensation — how humbly should it be received,—how implicitly venerated,—how dutifully obeyed. *We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three wit-*

nesses : of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ?

Ignorance of their natural blindness, and unconsciousness of their want of a spiritual teacher, were the principal causes which led to the rejection of our Lord's prophetic office on the part of the Jews. It is our duty to watch against the prevalence of a similar spirit. The avenues of the heart must be kept open to conviction, that the entrance of the good seed, as it falls from the hand of the sower, be not obstructed, and that its effect, when actually received, be not neutralized, by a mixture of earthly passions which corrupt, or of cares which choke it. Above all, there must be much prayer for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and invigorate the understanding, and to overcome that dulness which seems to be inseparable from man, when left to the poverty and weakness of his own unassisted

nature. And it has always been mercifully provided, that wherever there exists that fervent desire to learn in Christ's school, which wrought so powerfully in the heart of the Æthiopian Eunuch, there will never be wanting some Philip to guide the inquiring spirit, and to improve the day of small things into a season of abundant light and grace. Much of course will depend on the choice of our objects of study, and on our manner of studying them: Some are satisfied with any thing which exercises the intellectual powers, and some allow the empty and undigested ideas to pass over the mind, like objects over a mirror, without leaving on its surface any trace of permanent impression. This is to spend time, but not to improve it. It was while the Eunuch was reading the Scriptures, that the apostle was directed to join himself to his chariot. It was for searching the same Scriptures 'diligently,' that the Bereans were distinguished by the title of 'noble.' The heart of Lydia was opened, not only to become a hearer of the words of eternal life, but that she 'attended' unto the things which were

spoken of Paul. We are thus indirectly guided to the proper end of study, and to the mode by which that study may be rendered profitable to us. And God, assuredly, will not withhold his blessing from those who are searching for the truth in the book of Christ, and are pondering in their hearts all the knowledge they acquire, with a view to a progressive growth in heavenly wisdom.

4. We are especially called upon to attend to the contrast between the ministerial character of our Saviour, and that of all other teachers,—or, in the words of Scripture, *to consider the apostle of our profession, Christ Jesus*¹.

If we look at the Jewish teachers, we shall find them represented in the Bible either as dumb dogs, or as blind guides—either as slumbering on their posts, and betraying their charge through indolence, or as corrupting the faith committed to them, and making it void through their

¹ Heb. iii. 1.

traditions—either as teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, or as occupied in a vain and laborious trifling, which tended to withdraw the mind from any spiritual religion. The remarkable contrast between the teaching of the Scribes and that of our Lord, is very forcibly intimated by the frequency with which the Evangelists bring them into comparison². Or if we look into the heathen nations, we shall find, as might be expected, among the best of the philosophers of the Pagan world, the temper and spirit of their religion but too faithfully portrayed in the character of its teachers. And even when we turn away from these corrupt sources of knowledge, and revert to the disciples of Christianity for examples of good and faithful servants in the office of teacher, we shall too often have reason to lament their departure from the perfect model exhibited by him from whom they derive their authority. There was something reprehensible found in five out of the seven ministers ad-

² Matt. vii. 28, 29, &c.

dressed by the Spirit in the Revelation². There was in Peter himself something to be blamed, even in the judgement of Paul ;—and so sharp a contention arose between Paul and Barnabas, that they were obliged to renounce the comfort of mutual co-operation, and departed to labour separately in different parts of the same vineyard.

At the same time the providence of God has so ordered it, that since the original appointment of an order of men set apart for the work of the ministry, there have never been wanting in the profession bright examples of zeal and diligence which have shone like lights in the visible church. An examination of the characters of the several apostles, would show in a very instructive manner how divine grace can call into action the different tempers and abilities of men of every cast. The indolence of Mark, the violence of Peter, and the fiery zeal of Paul, were all overruled by the penetrating

² Rev. ii. iii.

Influence of that renewing spirit which, when received into the heart, is able to leaven the whole lump. So too in the second century Justin was an instance of the consecration of learning to the service of God; Valentinian, in the fourth, of a violent temper, in a great degree subdued by religious principle; while the change in the character of Jerome strikingly exhibits the effect of divine grace on a disposition naturally intractable and rugged.

But these are instances of Christian teachers who have been remarkable for the successful cultivation of some single virtue. If we advance a step farther, and look for such an assemblage of Christian graces combined in one individual, as Chrysostom for instance has enumerated in his requisites for a pastor³, it will be seen how

³ The passage is a remarkable one, and deserves to be quoted at length :

Ἐπιόησον οὖν ὁποῖόν τινα εἶναι χρή τὸν πρὸς ταῦτον μέλλοντα ἀντίξεν χεῖμῆτα, καὶ τὸσαῦτα καλύματα τῶν κοινῇ συμφερόντων διαθήσκει καλῶς. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ σέμνδν καὶ ἄτυφοι, καὶ φοβερόν καὶ προσηγῆ, καὶ ἀρχικόν καὶ κανονικόν, καὶ ἀδίκαστον καὶ θεραπευτικόν, καὶ ταπεινόν καὶ ἀδούλωτον, καὶ σφοδρόν καὶ ἡμερόν εἶναι δὲ ἵνα πρὸς πάντα ἅπαντα εὐκόλως μάχισθαι δύνηται, καὶ τὸν ἐπιτηδεῶν

rarely any measure of such a display occurs in one who is not exempt from human infirmities. The union of many virtues in one heart is a sight so lovely, that angels might desire to look upon it; but the union of contradictory excellencies, wherever found, and in whatever degree, cannot fail to form an extraordinary character. Milner remarks of Cyprian, that to unite such seemingly opposite things as discretion and fortitude, each in a very high degree, is a sure characteristic of greatness in a Christian. He calls it grace in its highest exercise⁴. For, as Bowdler⁵ has beautifully, as well as truly observed, a principle of compensation runs through the works of God. In the physical and intellectual world this is observable; and so also in morals: the stronger virtues are seldom found without an alloy of austerity, and the softer are nearly allied to weakness. It is

μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς ἰξουσίας, καὶ ἅπαντες ἀντιπύπτωσι, παράγυν, καὶ τὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον μετὰ τῆς αὐτῆς ἰξουσίας, καὶ ἅπαντες συμπνέωσι, μὴ προσίσθαι, ἀλλ' εἰς ἐν μόνον ὄραν τὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀκοδομήν· καὶ μηδὲν πρὸς ἀπείχουαν ἢ χαίρειν ποιῆν.—Chrysost. de Sacerdot. Lib. III. Ch. xvi.

⁴ Church Hist. i. 338.

⁵ Select Pieces, p. 337.

plain that compensation implies defect, and we therefore reasonably might suppose that in the character of Christ the rule should be no longer verified. And thus we find it. His force was without harshness, his tenderness free from imbecility. Nor is this all. Not only were his virtues unaccompanied with their kindred failings, but the most opposite excellencies were found in him in equal proportions. It is to him therefore that we must look for that consistent and uniform symmetry of moral character, of which we shall in vain search for example among other teachers.

5. Finally, we are warned against the danger of neglecting the words of the prophet of our dispensation. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven*⁶.

⁶ Heb. xii. 25.

If this be true, when addressed to the general community of Christians, with what solemn force does the admonition apply to those who watch over the souls of their fellow-men as they who must give account. The Scriptures contain two classes of directions, which may be considered as referring more particularly to those who are entrusted with ministerial functions. The first class includes all those which relate to the discharge of the fundamental duty of their office, the message they have to deliver, and the faithful and right division of the word,—while all such as are of secondary importance,—the manner of communicating instruction and reproof—prudential admonitions calculated to rectify the judgement—the discretion requisite for the due management of a delicate mission—may be properly referred to the second class. With these passages of Scripture for their daily manual, and with our Lord's own example as a commentary upon them, the pious hope expressed in the ordination service may by God's grace be fulfilled, that the members of the

priesthood 'may wax riper and stronger in their ministry, and that they may so endeavour, from time to time, to sanctify the lives of them and theirs, and to fashion them after the will and doctrine of Christ, that they may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow.'

CHAPTER II.

*Peculiarities in the Ministry of Christ incidental
to his divine Nature.*

NOTHING is more humiliating to a mind truly fixed upon God, than the mixture of earthly leaven which often works within us, and debases the character of our most spiritual pursuits. It continually reminds us of the state of imperfection to which man has been reduced since sin came into the world; so that at the highest pitch of human attainments there is reason to complain of the contracted scope of our faculties, and in the purest moments of heavenly communion we are constrained to acknowledge the intrusion of low and worldly associations. Like the apostles whose eyes were heavy at the moment of the transfiguration of their Lord, it would seem as if the mind of man were not able to contemplate with a steady

gaze the highest glories of heaven, even when revelation has removed the veil which shrouded them.

Those in particular who exercise the ministerial office, have occasion to feel more than others this infirmity. At every step they experience that they are men of like passions with their fellow-men, whom it is their duty to keep within the bounds of Christian moderation. They themselves have need to learn daily in the school of Christ, and yet they are called upon to bring out of their storehouse things new and old for the instruction of others. They hear their conscience whispering to them at every recurring instance of their own ignorance of spiritual knowledge, *Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?* Are the members of their respective flocks subject to be led astray by the temptations of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life? The shepherds and guardians of God's fold are themselves exempt from none of those trials, and are insensible to none of those allurements

which lead away captive the souls they have in charge. Are men averse by nature from the things which belong to their peace? Their teachers also have their own besetting and prevailing affections, which obstruct the progress of spirituality in their souls, and occupy them with those grovelling pursuits by which the world detains them from more heavenly considerations. Are others harassed with occasional doubts and unbelief, or tempted to a sinful compliance with the prejudices of their fellow-men in opposition to the claims of duty? They, too, like the chosen leader of the Israelites¹, are liable to an unadvised distrust of God's power, or of his faithfulness to his promises; or, like the apostle to the circumcision², they may be inclined to overlook the intrusion of dangerous error, through fear of giving offence to received opinions. Are others forced to exercise a perpetual vigilance, lest the great enemy of salvation should find some outwork of the heart unguarded, and enter in, and sow tares among the wheat un-

¹ Numb. xx. 8—12.

² Gal. ii. 11—16.

awares? They, too, be they even like Paul himself in zeal and devotion and heavenly-mindedness, are obliged to keep under their body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when they have preached to others, they themselves should be castaways.

It is precisely in this respect that the ministry of Christ differs from every other ministry. Every other ministry is derivative, — Christ's alone is original, and distinguished throughout by a manifestation of perfect independence. Other teachers are as earthen vessels from which the water of life is poured forth in a scanty, and it may be, in a polluted stream. But Christ is the fountain from which they are all supplied; the parent source of every fertilizing rill which waters the spiritual vineyard. 'Of his fulness have all we received'³. Other teachers, however high and honourable their office, and however important the word which is given them to speak, are still but messengers, subordinate to some superior power, and sent as

³ John, i. 16.

stewards under the will of another to execute a particular commission. Christ alone is the head of his own church, supreme in authority, and rendering account to no one for the exercise of his sovereignty. Other teachers have gifts differing according to circumstances of situation, of talent, of opportunities of usefulness. Some have the word of wisdom, some the word of knowledge, some faith, some discerning of spirits, some the interpretation of tongues. Some are apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers⁴. But Christ united in himself all these diversities of gifts, and performed alone all these differences of administrations; he combined in his own person whatever was excellent in the character of each, and afforded in all an example of faultless perfection. *He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by mea-*

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 8. Eph. iv. 11.

*sure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand*⁵.

It need scarcely be remarked, that our Saviour, as a teacher, derived the most important advantages from this fulness which dwelt in him, 'even all the fulness of the godhead bodily.'

I. He enjoyed in an indefinite degree unlimited grace from above, and unlimited communications of the Holy Spirit.

The grace that is in others is, in a certain sense at least, restricted, and varies 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ;' but his is infinite and immeasurable, for 'the Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him'⁶, though it seems to have been conveyed to him in his human nature by distinct and progressive illuminations. His mental faculties appear to have been ripened into maturity after the manner of men, and his reasonable

⁵ John, iii. 31, 34, 35.

⁶ Eph. iv. 7. John, iii. 34.

soul to have been as susceptible of gradual developement, as his human flesh of daily advancement from infancy to manhood. Jesus 'increased in wisdom,' as well as 'in stature,' and in favour with God and man⁷. Others have the privilege, and a glorious privilege it is, to go to the fountain-head, and draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation. But Christ has life uncommunicated, inherent in himself; 'As the Father hath life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself⁸.' He proceeded forth, and came from God, in a way which no *creature* ever could.

The Baptist, though himself a burning and a shining light, acknowledged at his first interview with our Lord, that He had the residue of the Spirit, and that it was needful for all preachers of righteousness to desire a portion of that spirit from his inexhaustible stores, before they could be accepted themselves, or useful to others. 'I have need to be baptized of thee,

⁷ Luke, ii. 52.

⁸ John, v. 26.

and comest thou to me ?⁹ Nor did John conceal the same truth from his disciples, although the confession might have the effect of decreasing their number, or diminishing the measure of respect paid to himself. He embraced every opportunity of drawing off their attention from his own character, and of magnifying him that taketh away the sin of the world. It was sufficient for him to be the friend of the bridegroom. ‘ I indeed baptize you with ^{word of God} water to repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire¹. However bright his own beams might appear to a generation sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, they were but derived and reflected from that original and essential light, which was henceforth to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Israel. Like a star which had fulfilled its purpose in the night season, he was content to wane and set, when the sun of righteousness had arisen with healing in

⁹ Matt. iii. 14.¹ Matt. iii. 11.

his wings. *I must decrease*, said this mighty preacher of repentance, *and he must increase*.

And who shall say that the personal estimation in which John's followers held their master, was lessened by this noble testimony which he bore to him, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? It is the peculiar property of the fulness of Christ, that no one can suffer by the contrast of his own insufficiency with the height and depth of that abundant grace which is in Christ Jesus. There can be no comparison between the darkness of the most enlightened created being, and that ineffable light which beams around the brows of our Saviour, and casts into the shade all the borrowed glories of fallen and finite beings. The herald who prepares the way, and makes the paths straight before the approach of some mighty conqueror, may challenge admiration and notice for a time, in the absence of a more important personage; but he sinks into insignificance and neglect when the object of universal attention, the desire of all nations, comes for-

ward to take his proper place, and to claim his own proper rank in the appointed solemnities.

II. The enjoyment of unlimited power was another feature peculiar to the ministry of Christ.

Of whom else do we read, that *he returned in the power of the Spirit*², after sustaining a temptation of unexampled length and difficulty? Or to whom else do we see such supreme and absolute authority committed, as silenced even his most determined enemies? ‘They were all amazed at the mighty power of God’³. Our Lord claims this privilege for himself in the last words he addressed to his disciples previously to his ascension, when the reserve with which he had before declared his attributes, became no longer necessary. ‘All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth’⁴.

This is his first assumption of universal principality, though in particular cases he

² Luke, iv. 14.

³ Luke, ix. 43.

⁴ Matt. xxviii. 18.

had partially vindicated his right to it before, and that right had been sometimes unwillingly admitted and acknowledged. *The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins. I have power to lay down my life, and power to take it. With power he commanded the unclean spirits, and they came out. Even the wind and the sea obey him. He gave, too, the most indisputable proof of the full possession of uncontrouled authority, by delegating a portion of it to others. I give you power to tread on serpents, and over all the power of the enemy; nothing shall hurt you. When he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease*⁵.

This suggests another particular, in which the difference between the originating power of Christ, and the vicarious agency of his followers, is strikingly contrasted. Moses wrought miracles; some of the prophets were gifted with a

⁵ Matt. ix. 6. Matt. viii. 27. Matt. x. 1. Luke, iv. 36. Luke, x. 19.

similar privilege ; and the disciples, as we have seen, were, even during the lifetime of their master, enabled to perform many wonderful works in his name. But there is something peculiar and sublime in the manner in which our Saviour exercised functions which in one sense he may thus be said to have enjoyed only in common with others. The superior efficacy of his sovereign word is distinguished far above the most successful ministrations of subordinate agents. When the afflicted father brought his son to the disciples, possessed with an evil spirit which deprived him of speech and hearing, he besought them to cast him out, and they could not. But when recourse was had to the omnipotence of Jesus, and he had rebuked the devil with that voice which even rebellious spirits dared not disobey, the child was cured from that very hour⁶. Thus the performance of things impossible even to the most faithful and zealous of his ministers, belongs exclusively to the Lord of all power and might; and we must learn to seek the highest

⁶ Matt. xvi. 14—18.

blessings at their source, to address our prayers to the throne of grace through Christ alone, and to rest our dependance singly on the help of his almighty arm. The apostles, gifted as they were with the distinction of extraordinary endowments, never failed to make an open acknowledgment of him under whom they acted, and by the power of whose name they were enabled to become the useful instruments of his mercy. They earnestly disdained all pretensions to any honour, but that of bearing the commission of their master, for whose sole glory all the wonders that they wrought were intended. ‘Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this, or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power and holiness we had made this man to walk? His name (that of the Holy One and the Just), through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.’ And in exact conformity with this

⁷ Acts, iii. 6, 16.

acknowledgement of the superior source from which Peter derived all his ability to cure, he said to the cripple, when about to work the miracle in his behalf, which excited so much amazement in the Jews, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' How great is the difference between this language of the Apostle and that of our Lord on similar occasions. 'Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague,—Damsel, I say unto thee, arise,—I will, be thou clean,—Peace, be still^s,—were the words of sovereignty with which he addressed the objects on whom the fulness of his almighty power was exercised.

Nor, as has been remarked for the purpose of showing that Christ was one with, and equal to the Father, 'did he ever, except in the case of Lazarus for the sake of the spectators, make any appeal to his Father, or give the least intimation of any power exerted, except what was inherent in himself.' The apostles, on the con-

^s Mark, v. 34, 41. Matt. viii. 3. Mark, iv. 39.

trary, perpetually remind the converts of their own weakness and unworthiness; and that even the benefits which individuals had derived from the personal ministry of their teachers were to be attributed to the grace of God which was given them through Christ Jesus, seeing that in every thing they were enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge⁹.

III. Another distinguishing property of our Lord's ministry, is the power he bestows on those who receive with meekness his engrafted word, of advancing progressively to higher degrees of divine knowledge, of which there is no other limitation than man's capacity for its reception.

The sphere of instruction which can be proposed in the school of any other master, is more or less contracted in proportion to the nature of the object of study. For instance, the attendants on the schools of the prophets would

⁹ 1 Cor. i. 4, 5.

have the advantage, so far as we can judge from the little that is known respecting the institution, of acquiring a competent knowledge of the Jewish law ; but their studies would not have qualified them for understanding such subjects as the true character of the Mosaic dispensation, or the spiritual meaning of the sacrifices and ceremonial observances. Like those of whom St. Paul prophesied as about to rise in the last days¹, though ever learning, they were never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Again, the disciples of John the Baptist would have obtained from the repeated warnings of their master a correct idea of the near approach of the kingdom of heaven, and of the necessity of repentance ; but yet they were left totally ignorant of other things with which it highly imported them to be acquainted. They did not so much as know whether there were any Holy Ghost, and were slow to acknowledge

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 7.

that Christ was the Messiah who should come, though John bare express testimony to the fact².

But it is a special privilege attending our Lord's doctrine, that it embraces all useful knowledge, and unfolds new objects for meditation, in proportion as we obtain an insight into the first principles of divine truth. If we have begun to attend on Christ, *our path will shine more and more unto the perfect day*. For the inquirer whose soul is athirst for God, the stone is rolled away from the mouth of the well, and a fountain opened from whence springs up a never-failing source of refreshment. It was not any exclusive promise of some extraordinary communication granted to the chosen disciples, but it was to the Jews at large who believed, that Jesus said, *Ye shall know the truth*³; a declaration which has been fulfilled in favour of those who are taught of God in all ages. The

² Acts, xix. 2. Matt. ii. 3.

³ John, viii. 32.

spirit of truth guides them into all truth⁴. To them it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly⁵.

God's dealings with the Eastern Magi were analogous to his customary manner of opening and teaching the heart. All was gradual, and yet progressive. He placed in the heavens the appearance of a star; he attracted their attention to its course; he disposed them to follow its leading; he brought them onwards on their way in faith and hope, till they finally came where the young child was, to derive from the object of their admiration, even in his lowly

⁴ The argument is not materially impaired, even if we understand this text in the limited sense to which Lightfoot restricts it. "The words in John, xvi. 13, are appropriate to the apostles. None ever were, or will be, whom God 'led into all truth,' save the apostles. He leads indeed every saint he hath into all truth needful for him,—but the apostles into all truth needful, both for themselves and the whole church; because God, by them, was to give the rule of faith and manners to all the church."—Works, vol. v. 211.

⁵ Matt. xiii. 11, 12.

manger, new lights and a more excellent wisdom than that which they had hitherto cultivated. The very next revelation which was made to them was of a higher order; it was no longer by a star that they were directed, but they were warned by God in a dream to defeat the intentions of Herod, by returning to their country another way.

Such, too, is usually the progress of divine grace. Small in its beginnings, like a grain of mustard-seed, it gradually expands and strengthens; and though while the day of small things lasts, we see as it were through a glass darkly, a blessing is shed on him who seeks humbly to know the truth, until the first glimmering of the star in the East brightens into the glorious light of the Sun of righteousness, and all the mercies of redemption are clearly displayed through the angel of the covenant.

The religious progress of Mary, as it may be traced in the concise narrative of the Evangelists, shews in another way how Christ gives

his disciples grace for grace, and strength in proportion to their strength,—a gift which no other teacher could impart to his followers. We read of her, that she listened to our Lord's discourses with that diligent and humble attention which is described by the proverbial phrase of sitting at Jesus' feet⁶. Nor was it in vain that her eyes saw, and her ears heard, and her heart pondered upon that wisdom which many prophets and kings under the old dispensation had desired to witness, had the fulfilment of their wish been consistent with the divine purposes. That pious and prophetic act of love which she soon afterwards performed in the house of Simon the leper, towards the person of him who had raised her brother, and which was to be spoken of as a memorial of her affection wheresoever the Gospel was preached, both showed how well she had chosen the better part, and how wisely she had profited in improving the advantages of her situation by drinking of the waters of the well of life at the fountain head⁷.

⁶ Luke, x. 39.

⁷ Matt. xxvi. 6—13.

The case of him who was born blind was similar. After he had been excommunicated by the members of the Sanhedrim, in consequence of the boldness with which he had maintained in their presence that his benefactor was sent from God, Jesus met him privately, and asked him respecting his belief in the promised Messiah. His answer was so full of earnest yet humble docility, and expressed so much solicitude to become acquainted with the desire of all nations, that it met with an immediate recompense from him who is a rewarder of them that seek him diligently. 'He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?' Then Jesus, in order that he might be the first to inherit the blessing promised to those who should suffer persecution for his sake, revealed himself as the Messiah, with a degree of freedom very different from the caution usual with our Lord on this subject. 'He said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee⁸.'

⁸ John, ix. 24—37.

The new disciple, Nathanael, enjoyed the same privilege under the divine teaching. Christ notices the conviction produced in his mind by a single instance of his omniscience, and promises him that in future he shall enjoy greater help for the establishment of his faith. 'Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these?'

But above all, the encouragement afforded for the improvement of any talent connected with our Christian calling may be well illustrated from the account given of Apollos, Acts, xviii. 24—28. When he began his ministry he had a very contracted view of the nature of his office. But his zeal according to his measure of knowledge, was the occasion of bringing him to the notice of Aquila and Priscilla, and by their means to a more perfect acquaintance with the purposes of God respecting

* John, i. 50.

man. Nor is the change in the apostle John less remarkable. Originally he was one of the 'sons of thunder;' and the impetuosity of character which led Christ to apply such a surname to him, is marked in his hasty proposal to call down fire from heaven to consume the inhabitants of a village which refused to admit our Lord. But observe the temper of the same Apostle afterwards, when he was composing the three Epistles which bear his name. Compare the language in which he addresses his little children in the Lord, and the elect lady, and the well-beloved Gaius, with the uncharitable feeling which marked his early attendance on Jesus. The affectionate manner in which he expatiates throughout on the love of God to man, and again and again pathetically enforces on believers love to each other by every imaginable motive, is worthy of him whom Jesus loved, and who had such intimate opportunities of studying the great principle of the Gospel in the very bosom of its author.

Thus was it that the disciples enjoyed advantages, which, when duly improved, enlarged

their minds for the admission of all the treasures of divine truth, and filled them with the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Christ. Day by day new prospects opened to their view—remaining prejudices were gradually dispelled—the purposes of God's counsels were revealed to them in clearer demonstrations, and their capacities were quickened in a manner which bespoke the divine perfection of Him who thus gave them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries were unable to gainsay. Like their heavenly master himself, in the development at least, though not in the measure of their attainments, they grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon them¹.

IV. A further peculiarity of our Saviour's ministry, was the manner in which, although the author of a new dispensation, he fulfilled all the ordinances of the law about to be superseded.

¹ Luke, ii. 40.

Various opinions appear to have prevailed relative to the change which it was supposed the Messiah, at his coming, would make in the ancient religion. Christ however put an end to these misconceptions, by declaring in the longest public discourse which he is recorded to have delivered, that his mission was to accomplish, not to subvert or counteract, that introductory dispensation which had so long served 'as a shadow of the good things to come.' 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil'.²

Considered indeed in his human nature, Jesus was morally bound to observe the legal obligations then existing. St. Paul lays a stress on this necessity. *He was made under the law*³. Thus his first public appearance was a proof of his regard for the institutions of his nation. It was required that at a certain period of life all the Jewish youths should be examined with reference to their proficiency in religion, by the doctors of the synagogue. Accordingly when

² Matt. v. 17.

³ Gal. iv. 4.

he was twelve years old, and had gone up to Jerusalem with his parents to the feast, he took that opportunity of submitting himself to the masters of Israel, and complying with what appears to have been the established custom⁴.

From first to last, therefore, he who was prefigured in all the ceremonial observances of the Jewish worship, and whose purer doctrines were intended finally to supersede the preparatory commandments taught by Moses, himself conformed to the whole law, whether ritual or moral, in all its branches;—he was circumcised, although about to introduce in the place of that ceremony an initiatory rite of another description;—he was brought to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, and redeemed as the first born of his parents, according to the law of Moses, from the inferior services of the temple, although he was destined to be the high priest of a more excellent ministry, after another order;—he conformed even in less im-

⁴ See Le Bas' Sermons, p. 5.

portant particulars to the established rules of the synagogue, 'standing up for to read' as a member of his own congregational place of worship, and sitting down to expound, as the custom was, when he had closed the sacred volume;—he went up periodically unto the feasts, and attended to all the circumstantial rites of the passover in their prescribed order⁵, although he was himself about to be offered, 'as the

⁵ 'He (St. John) gives an account of his going up to the passover; and unless there may be some scruple about the third, from John, vi. he resorted to all between his baptism and his death. Now in all the evangelists you cannot find, that when he came there, he differed the least tittle from the custom and order that was constantly used by the church at that solemnity. Nay, they that are versed in the Jews' records, and see their customs there, may show you how he followed the rubrics and ritual of that passover from point to point. His manner of sitting at the table, his beginning the meal with a cup of wine, his ending it with a cup of blessing,—his using bread and wine,—his concluding with a psalm; and indeed his whole demeanour at the meal, compared with the Jews rubric and custom for the solemnity, does clearly speak that he kept close communion with the whole church in that great symbol of communion. He that was to be the paschal lamb himself, and to fulfil what the typical ordinance signified, would not, might not, confound or cross the constant received order of that solemnity.'—Lightfoot's Works, vol. vi. p. 221.

lamb slain from the foundation of the world ;' —he kept the seventh day sabbath, although from henceforth the day devoted to God was to take its date from that important event which proved beyond all doubt the reality of his own Messiahship, and to be distinguished with peculiar honour by the name of ' the Lord's day '.*

Neither did our Saviour exempt others who came within the sphere of his influence from paying respect to those ordinances to which he submitted in his own person. A patient whose disorder had been removed by none of the usual means of cure, but who had been rendered whole by the miraculous exercise of those healing powers which were resident in the Son of God, might have considered himself relieved from the necessity of complying with the directions pro-

* Rev. i. 10. Sherlock has remarked in the fourth dissertation annexed to his Discourse on Prophecy, that our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem riding on an ass, was an instance of his strict observance of the divine law, God having forbidden the people of Israel the use of the horse in their armies. Deut. xvii. 16. See also Doddridge's Paraphrase of Matt. xxi. 5, with his note on that verse.

vided in the Mosaic law for ordinary cases. Our Lord therefore expressly orders a leper whom he had cleansed to go and shew himself to the priest, and offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them⁷. The jealousy with which the Jews would have regarded any infraction of their religion, may be inferred from the disturbances which afterwards arose, when Paul and Barnabas were accused of undervaluing the obligations of the ceremonial law in the matter of circumcision⁸. Such indeed was the caution of Jesus in this particular, that he even enjoins obedience to those who were personally unworthy of respect, for the sake of the office they held, and in honour to the authority of their situation⁹.

But further than this, since it became Christ to fulfil all righteousness, he was anointed with his priestly office, as Aaron, the first Jewish high priest, was consecrated into the exercise of his functions¹. And at the end of his ministry, as

⁷ Matt. viii. 4. Luke, xvii. 14. ⁸ Acts, xv. 1—30.

⁹ Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

¹ Exod. xxiv. 4—7. Ps. xlv. 7. Heb. i. 9. Acts, x. 38.

the Jewish high priest offered up atonement for himself and all his family, so too the Captain of our salvation, when about to finish his course, notwithstanding that his priesthood was superior to that of Moses, inasmuch as it was not successional, but everlasting, interceded solemnly once for all his followers in that affecting prayer contained in the seventeenth chapter of St. John². So fully did the prophecy of Isaiah receive its completion,—‘*The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable*³.’

V. The last characteristic of the ministry of Christ which need be mentioned in connexion with this subject, the authority with which he spoke, was in a great measure the natural result of those peculiarities which have been already considered. This qualification was observed in an early stage of his labours, and seems to have excited more attention than any of the other external advantages of his teaching. ‘The

² Levit. xvi. 17. Rom. vi. 10. Heb. ix. 26.

³ Is. xlii. 21.

people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes⁴.

Our Lord once said to the Jews, 'Ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world, I am not of this world.' It is precisely this distinction which gives a weight to his instructions, which those of every human teacher of religion cannot acquire. The earthly vessel must in some degree defile the doctrine which it contains, whatever may be the purity of its heavenly original. And yet if even the man Stephen were so filled with power by the Holy Ghost, that his enemies 'were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake⁵,' what must have been the mighty effect of our Saviour's language, proceeding from the lips of him who was Master and Head of all, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven! Truly, as the spirit of prophecy spoke concerning him, 'his word was like as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces⁶.'

⁴ Matt. vii. 29.

⁵ Acts, vi. 10.

⁶ Jer. xxiii. 29.

God had of old given the law from Mount Sinai, and the terrors with which its delivery were accompanied, were sufficient to shew the sanctity and awe with which its precepts were to be regarded. But Jesus, speaking with still more authority, though not with the voice which shook the earth, vindicates to himself a power from which there is no appeal; which extends or limits, which enforces or annuls, as the case may require, whatever has been sanctioned by the will of previous legislators, whether human or divine. He speaks in the style and character of a sovereign⁷, and ‘where the word of a king is, there is power, and who may say unto him, What doest thou⁸?’ ‘Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill—thou shalt not commit adultery—thou shalt not forswear thyself—but I say unto you,’ that the spiritual import of these commands

⁷ So Jerome and Theophylact and others explain the authority with which Christ spoke. Others, however, affirm, that this would be contrary to his prophetic office, and to the declaration that his doctrine was not his own, but his that sent him. See John, vii. 16—18. viii. 28. xii. 49. xiv. 10.

⁸ Eccles. viii. 4.

has a much more extensive signification than you conceive, and forbids not only murder and adultery and perjury, but all anger, all impurity of the heart, all extra-judicial appeals to God in confirmation of testimony. This was indeed the commanding voice of the beloved Son, to whom his Father had solemnly invited all the peoples of the earth to listen. ‘*Hear ye him*’⁹. And well might the Apostle to the Hebrews call on them to ‘*see that they refused not him that speaketh ; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more*’ should not those escape who ‘*turn away from him that speaketh from heaven*’¹.

But notwithstanding the eminent qualifications which thus remarkably distinguished the ministry of our Lord, the small number of his actual disciples will not surprise any one who has attended to the nature of the human heart, and to the dominion which is exercised over it by the influence of things present. If we look

⁹ Matt. xvii. 5.

¹ Heb. xii. 25.

to the success of the most eminent preachers, we shall find a result very disproportionate to what might have been expected from their labours, even from the earliest periods of sacred history. We know that Noah, though 'a preacher of righteousness,' had so little effect upon the wickedness of the world around him, that when God looked upon the earth, 'all flesh had corrupted his way upon it,' and he only and his family were found righteous before the Lord in the whole of that generation². We know that though 'just Lot,' dwelling among the wicked, 'vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds,' yet he was so far from prevailing in any degree to turn them from the error of their ways, that there were not ten righteous men found in all Sodom to redeem the city from destruction³.

It was a similar defection of the people which rendered the duty of the prophets so discouraging. In the time of Elijah, one only

² 2 Pet. ii. 5. Gen. vi. 12. vii. 1.

³ 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

appeared openly for the Lord, and there seem to have been in all the congregations of Israel only 'seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal,' and even of this scanty remnant but a very small proportion was known to the prophet⁴. So too Isaiah, though the Spirit of the Lord was poured upon him so fully, that he has been called the Evangelical prophet, was yet constrained to exclaim in the bitterness of his disappointed hopes for his countrymen,—*'Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed'*⁵?—a passage to which St. John has referred as a prediction, in its secondary sense at least, of the little effect which should attend the promulgation of the Gospel.

Lastly, though John continued to the end 'a burning and a shining light'—his lamp still bright in the candlestick of the church, and his oil not wasting, yet the people were willing only 'for a season to rejoice in his light'⁶. Their

⁴ 1 Kings, xix. 14—18.

⁵ Is. liii. 1.

⁶ John, v. 35.

affections changed and their zeal abated, though he was still the same earnest and faithful instrument in the hand of the Lord, whom they had received at first with so much favour. And when we add to these instances of the failure of means provided by God for the admonition of his people, that at the time of our Lord's ascension the number of his disciples seems to have amounted to little more than an hundred and twenty souls, let Christian ministers learn the lesson to which their attention is thus forcibly directed, not to live on the breath of popular credit, but to seek the honour which cometh from God only.

This subject may now be terminated with two or three practical conclusions.

1. The first has reference in particular to Christian teachers. If such were the perfections exhibited in the ministry of Jesus, which stood in need of no extraneous support, and laboured under no deficiency, surely our Lord's example teaches all who have the office of instructing

others, the necessity of doing every thing in the spirit of prayer. If any one could ever have been exempt from the duty of 'in all things making his request known unto God,' it would have been He to whom the Spirit was committed without measure, and to whom, being himself 'one with the Father,' the Father had given 'to have life in himself'.⁷

Yet after the fatigue of a day actively and laboriously spent, we find 'Christ retiring to a mountain to pray'.⁸ And immediately before he was to be betrayed into the hands of wicked men, he takes three of his disciples apart in the garden of Gethsemane, as witnesses of the mode in which he strengthened his soul by prayer against the sufferings which were about to assault it. Thus must secret devotion ever attend public labours—for even the 'voice of the charmer,' and the most eloquent persuasion of human wisdom, will be without effect or influence, like 'a tinkling cymbal,' or as the 'very

⁷ John, v. 26.

⁸ Matt. xiv. 23.

lovely song of Ezekiel⁹, unless accompanied by the divine blessing, which alone can incline the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

2. The want of success, which under all the circumstances was so remarkable a feature of our Saviour's ministry, has been already noticed. A stronger proof cannot be given of the necessity of divine grace to soften the prejudices of the human mind. *Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet believed they not him*¹. And then the Evangelist, with reference to the text of Isaiah which has been already quoted, attributes this extraordinary unbelief on the part of the Jews, to the blindness of their eyes, and the hardness of their hearts. Indeed, Christ himself gives the same reason for their neglect of him, and founds on it an express charge against them. *'Ye will not come to me that ye may have life.'*

⁹ Ezek. xxxiii, 32.

¹ John, xii. 37.

At the same time, if the immediate results of such a ministry were so inconsiderable, there is no reason for discouragement, if the usefulness of the inferior workers in God's vineyard do not always appear to correspond with their exertions. If times occur when their labours seem to be less acceptable, let it not be a cause for relaxation in diligence, or for despondency in spirit, or for remission in prayer. Let it rather be an argument for renewed energy, for greater zeal and earnestness. Like Abraham, let us become yet more importunate in pleading for our charge, in proportion as the number of those righteous men diminishes, whose presence might have redeemed the remainder from destruction.

3. Lastly, we are to recollect that the communication of spiritual blessings to his servants was the effect and consequence of our great teacher's own fulness. '*Of his fulness have all we received*'². For it pleased the Father that

² John, i. 16.

in him should all fulness dwell, that the whole body of believers should be 'complete in him'.³ It is, therefore, through this attribute that Christ is made unto us the inexhaustible source of every blessing which it is his province to confer—our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and redemption.

³ Col. i. 19. ii. 10.

CHAPTER III.

*Peculiarities in the Ministry of Christ, incidental
to the Novelty of the Religion.*

AT the season of our Lord's advent as prophet of the church, that part of the world which was selected for the scene of his personal ministry, had been long in possession of a religious system closely interwoven with the civil polity, and stamped with the authority of heaven by the miraculous manner in which it had been originally communicated.

During the lapse of fifteen centuries it had been handed down from generation to generation, identified with the earliest feelings of the people, and cherished with their latest breath; its records forming their principal, if not their only written learning, and its study furnishing a stated employment to their wisest men. So

So intimately were the observances of the ceremonial law connected with the recurrence of certain times and seasons, that none of the ordinary concerns of life could be carried on without bringing to mind the religious government under which the nation was placed, and thus carrying back the thoughts amid the temporal cares of life to the contemplation of that Providence, on whose almighty will the whole chain of human events depends. The annual meetings of all classes of the people at the central seat of worship would serve to give consistency and agreement to the general feeling, and would consolidate a large number of individuals holding the same faith and expectations under the form of one united and eminently national religious body.

Provision was thus effectually made, as far as external ordinances could provide, against any separation from the covenant ; and the spirit of schism would be discouraged, if not altogether checked, in the very outset. Under such a system, any innovation on the hereditary be-

lief, which if introduced into the remoter provinces might have escaped notice in ordinary cases, till it became formidable by the accession of numerous adherents, would immediately attract attention in a quarter vested with authority to suppress it; and hence conformity to the established order of things would be preserved pure and universal through every part of the Jewish empire.

To interfere with a religion thus fenced in by the solemnities of an imposing antiquity, and fortified by its hold on the affections and habits of the people, would obviously be a work attended with no ordinary difficulty. Even the prophets who had appeared under the old dispensation without proclaiming any change in the terms and regulations of the existing covenant, had experienced no inconsiderable opposition. The assurances which they gave of the approaching advent of a Messiah, who should be set up for the light, as well as for the salvation of his church, were so contrary to the current of prevailing opinions, that the promulga-

tors of these truths were received with distrust and coldness, and in some cases they were requited for their prophecies with imprisonment or death.

When, therefore, a teacher appeared in the very centre of Judea, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the temple, whose doctrines were so far from coinciding with the received system, that they virtually superseded the whole mechanism of the old economy, and who destroyed that most important feature of the Jewish faith which formed the very ground-work of their eternal hopes, their federal title to salvation, instead of meeting with minds prepared for the ready acceptance of his preaching, and listening with humble complacency to his revelation of the heavenly message, there was an instant decision in favour of the constituted religious authorities ; and the Jews of all classes and conditions rallied as it were with one accord around the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, against the God of the new covenant, the father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Owing to the operation of these causes, it not only became necessary for our Lord to contend with the jealousy which would be excited by the appearance of a new and popular expounder of the law, whose mode of teaching, without reference to the subject of his precepts, was favourably contrasted by the multitude with the proud or frivolous manner of the Scribes and Pharisees; but he had also to surmount all the prejudices attendant upon new doctrines and new terms, and to overcome the misconceptions to which the originality of the dispensation would inevitably give birth. For the Jews had much to unlearn, as well as to learn, before they could receive Jesus in the character of a prophet; and if he received no honour in his own country, it was due in fact partly to the strength of the national attachment in favour of the Mosaic institutions, as well as to the unpopularity of the new religion.

The very expressions of our Saviour's first address, as reported by St. Mark, were such as would astonish men who believed that they and

their ancestors had been already in possession for many centuries of an inalienable title to eternal life. ‘ *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel*.’

Acquainted as we are through the Scriptures with the prejudices and ignorance of the age, what can we conceive of the notion which a Jew would entertain of the fulfilment of any limited time, which should be the signal for the expiration of the privileges of which they had been so long in the undisturbed enjoyment? What would they understand of any kingdom of God distinct from that of which they had been the exclusive subjects; or if that kingdom were to be renewed and extended, they would rather look for its announcement with all the dignity and grandeur of sovereignty, and would desire to welcome its claims as a release from civil slavery, and the obnoxious yoke of a foreign power. Those who had hitherto counted for

¹ Mark, i. 15.

righteousness the observance of the ceremonial law, would listen with little interest to a new and unexpected call to repentance, and would reluctantly exchange their actual possession of an hereditary adoption, for a promised expectancy under the Gospel which they must be born again, and lead a new life, to inherit. They would have to lay afresh the foundations of their whole faith; and while they remained shut up in the narrowness of their original creed, our Saviour's words would be as foolishness to them, and the kingdom of God, though it might come to them in exhortation, and argument, and word, would not be received in power.

It was, therefore, requisite that before our Lord could procure admission into the hearts of his hearers, the veil of misconception should be torn away, which rested upon their darkened understandings. Pharisees and Sadducees must have previously sacrificed at the foot of his cross their respective opinions, and must have joined in the confession of one universal, though humiliating truth, that all had sinned—all had come

short of the glory of God—all stood alike in need of a new way of salvation which should be as free a gift as the pardon from sin which preceded it. It behoved that the first step should be the removal of error, the purging of the heart from the doctrines of Judaism, in order to erect in their place the superstructure of the purer faith of Christianity, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone of the building.

And in proportion as the first dispensation was eminently a self-justifying covenant, the terms of which were not grace but works, there would be additional difficulty in bending the spirit of mankind to the reception of a diametrically opposite principle, and bringing it under the influence of the novel doctrines of the covenant of redemption, the terms of which were not works but grace. There must have been a new feeling entertained respecting the extent and tendency of *the law*, as the Jews emphatically termed their religious code, before they could listen in simple acquiescence to the words of one who taught in effect that the law was only ‘a school-

master to bring them to Christ,' and that what they could not procure a title to under the law, as a right, the Gospel, if accepted, would freely confer on the most outcast and destitute among them as a gracious boon without money and without price. To those that believed in these conditions, Christ would indeed be precious, but to the great majority of the nation he would be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence.

This state of the world would give a peculiar character to the method pursued by our Lord in the execution of his personal ministry. As a preliminary measure to the propagation of the truth, he must dispel the false medium through which the Jews would be inclined to view him, by unfolding his real character, and the real nature of his mission.

It would be objected to him by some, that no good thing could come out of Nazareth. He would challenge them to come and see, and judge by the signs that he worked and the doctrines

that he preached, whether he were not indeed the Christ, although dwelling in a despised city of proverbial disrepute. Others would allege the meanness of his parentage, and the persecution with which he met, as the motives of their unbelief. He would remind them, that it was written concerning him that he should be 'meek and lowly'—'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' Few or none would be prepared to expect him as a prophet. He would tell them, that he was the light of the world, and that the words that he spake were spirit and life to them that believed². A very small remnant of Israel would be found looking for a spiritual kingdom which should be neither here nor there in a local and visible appearance, but in the hearts of his servants. He would tell them that his kingdom was not of this world, and that flesh and blood could not inherit it. Scarcely any would be 'waiting' like Simeon 'for the consolation of Israel.' He would declare himself as the salvation prepared before the face of all people. They would pride themselves upon

² John, vi. 63.

their respect for their lawgiver, and under the pretence of his authority would refuse to hearken to one greater than Moses, who taught amongst them. Christ would retort upon them, that there was one that accused their unbelief—even Moses in whom they trusted;—since had they believed Moses, they would have believed Christ; for he wrote of him ³.

In all these respects his province would rather be to show what the Jewish law was not, and what the prophet of the Gospel was not, than to expound in all their various ramifications the doctrines and duties of Christianity, and carry the new disciple through the several bearings of the system. The simple declaration of himself as the way, the truth, and the life, sufficed to overthrow the main principle on which the Mosaic covenant rested; and it will, therefore, appear to have been rarely our Lord's practice to dwell on any thing more than the general outline of his religion, which he left to be filled up at leisure by other hands, though

³ John, v. 45, 46.

still guided in every touch by his own practical teaching, and informed throughout by the never-failing aid of his inspiring spirit.

It was owing to these circumstances that the refutation of the prominent errors of his hearers was generally selected as the channel for communicating a knowledge of the truth.

If that hearer were a Pharisee, our Lord's discourses would commonly tend to lead him to a more spiritual apprehension of the promises of the Gospel by an exposure of the formal and hypocritical services of his sect.

If a Sadducee were to be converted, the mode of address would be changed, and a previous argument to convince him of the existence of a future state of retribution, would pave the way to his knowledge respecting our Lord's heavenly kingdom, and the way by which admission into it was offered.

With a Gentile, on the contrary, the first step would be to teach him to believe in the ex-

tension of Jewish privileges to the heathen world, and to look for the dawn of the sun of righteousness on the benighted nations of Paganism, before he could sit as a disciple at the feet of Jesus, and acknowledge him in faith as the Lamb of God through whom *was granted also to the Gentiles repentance unto life*⁴. Thus wisely did the ministry of Christ vary with circumstances, and receive a peculiar tone from its adaptation to the errors of the time, which must not be overlooked when it is taken as a pattern for imitation.

And here a question arises, how far the situation of the Christian world at any time since the introduction of the Gospel, has resembled the state of things which prevailed at the advent of our Lord. Or, in other words, whether the Christian preacher, like our Saviour, has to combat error before he can establish truth—to destroy the bulwarks of Satan, before he can set up the ensign of Christ.

⁴ Acts, ii. 18.

A retrospective glance at the eighteen centuries which have elapsed since the birth of Christ, will, it is to be feared, afford abundant proof that no essential difference exists in this respect between the task of the founder of the church, and that of his stewards and ministers in succeeding ages. Human nature, allowing for the modifications arising from the change of times, the progress of civilization, or the influence of a purer creed, is fundamentally the same under all circumstances. The resistance which the heart opposes to the doctrines of the Gospel, whether it be preoccupied or not with opinions contrary to the truth, is due as much to its natural tendency, as to disturbing causes of an accidental and temporary kind.

Doubtless this tendency derived additional strength in Judea, owing to the religious principles of the nation, which, from the nature of the Mosaic covenant, were little calculated to counteract it;—but so long as man is not of himself inclined to yield a spontaneous acquiescence to the humbling doctrines of Christianity,

—so long as there is a law in our members warring against the law of our mind,—so long as the flesh and the spirit have different sympathies, different desires, different objects of enjoyment and ultimate pursuit,—so long will it be necessary to begin the work of Christian teaching in the eradication of error, and to lay a foundation for the elements of the faith in its scriptural purity by expelling from the strongholds of the heart the spirit of practical unbelief which is inherent in our nature. Experience shows that even in a Christian land there is a necessity for continual watchfulness lest opinions should be imbibed inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel, or lest the corruptions of the world should debase the standard of spiritual holiness. The character of Christ as a sanctifier through the Holy Spirit from the power of sin, as well as a redeemer from its penalty, and the inapplicability of any other mode of salvation to the circumstances of man's case, must always be as prominent topics in addresses to the nominally Christian world, as they were in our Lord's discourses to his Jewish or Gentile hearers. The

mind must be dispossessed of whatever belief is in opposition to the fundamental truths of religion, before the doctrines of Christianity can make an effectual lodgement in the heart, or assume an adequate influence over the tenor of human conduct.

There is another peculiarity observable in our Lord's preaching, which, like the subject of the preceding remarks, is also in some degree incidental to the prior religious belief of his Jewish auditors.

The opposition which the rulers of the nation offered to the introduction of the Gospel, was for the most part ostensibly founded on their attachment to their own hereditary creed. It was important, therefore, for the teacher of the Christian revelation to show that had they rightly understood their own prophets, the actual appearance of the Messiah would have been found in no respect at variance with the promise of his coming, and that the law might have become the schoolmaster to bring them to

Christ, had they suffered it to occupy the province for which it was originally designed. Hence the references to Jewish partialities and writers, to Jewish history and opinions, to well known and acknowledged facts, which occur so frequently in our Saviour's discourses. To the traditions indeed with which the Scribes had corrupted the Scriptures, there is no allusion, except for the purpose of disapproval or refutation, because our Lord would not sanction what had rendered the written word of none effect even by indirectly availing himself of their authority.

But when he addresses himself to the rational faculty of the Pharisees,—a mode of teaching very common with him,—he sends them at once to the law and to the prophets, and brings his arguments home to their understandings by enlisting on his side the weight of their undisputed testimony.

In this way he proved the resurrection of the dead from the language of Moses at the bush ⁵.

⁵ Luke, xx. 37, compared with Ex. iii. 6.

He defended the disciples from the charge of profaning the sabbath day, by quoting the conduct of David on a similar emergency⁶. He silenced the displeasure of the high priests when the children received him with Hosannas in the temple, by asking, with apparent surprise, whether they had never read that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God had perfected praise⁷. He had just before availed himself of the authority of a text from Isaiah, on cleansing his Father's house from the profanations which had defiled it. And in general it may be remarked, that there was no mode by which he so often defended himself against accusation, or suppressed rising opposition, as by referring to the Jewish Scriptures, and thus protecting himself from the bitterness of their hatred under the shelter of their own pretended standard.

Again ; we know from the best authority, that a comparison of the life and ministry of our Saviour with the circumstances predicted of

⁶ Matt. xii. 3—6.

⁷ Matt. xxi. 16.

him in the Jewish writings, was the line of argument most commonly resorted to by the apostolical preachers.

It was thus that Philip converted to the Christian faith the Æthiopian eunuch; preaching unto him Jesus from the Scriptures, and explaining the perfect agreement of the facts which had actually taken place within the knowledge of living witnesses, with the prophecies delivered so many centuries before⁸. St. Peter also discussed the life of Jesus Christ, ‘testifying that to him gave all the prophets witness⁹.’ The same was St. Paul’s custom in the synagogues; alleging that Jesus ‘must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead’—or in other words, that Messiah, when he came in the flesh, must of necessity fulfil the things spoken of him in the prophets.

But it must be remembered, that the apostles, in following their master’s practice in this

⁸ Acts, viii. 35.

⁹ Acts, x. 43.

¹ Acts, xvii. 3.

respect, spoke as Jews unto Jews; and thus judiciously availed themselves of the prepossessions of their hearers to create an interest in favour of the Gospel of the Messiah. But the situation of the Christian preacher is so dissimilar, that he will find it requisite to make use of a sound discretion in imitating their example under a state of things entirely different. For it is of consequence to remark, that Christ has given us a pattern of the ministry, not with an intent that it should be servilely copied through succeeding ages, without respect of persons or times; but to be observed in spirit and meaning, under the exercise of a reasonable judgement, and with a due consideration to the change which an alteration of circumstances may render expedient.

Frequent evils have resulted from a want of attention to this obvious principle—language inapplicable to the existing state of the world has been used indiscriminately, by which some have been perplexed, others offended,—a confusion of terms has been created, often tending to the

serious corruption of the doctrines of the Gospel—absurdities have arisen which are in no way justly chargeable on Christianity itself, or its institutions, but which originate solely in the injudicious, though often well-meant, tone adopted by some of its advocates.

Certain it is, that there are eternal and definite truths which are unchangeable—that *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever*—that the fundamental principles of his religion must be presented always in the same unvarying form, simple, unbending, and immutable. In these points, to change would be to corrupt—and to omit, would be to incur the woe pronounced on every one who diminishes aught from the book of life. But though the general outline of the Christian system must remain the same, and stand for ever as a faithful model and memorial of times past to times present and times future, some of its constituent features may, with perfect propriety and fidelity to the original, be suffered for a season to remain in the back ground, while others

require to be displayed in a fuller light, and to occupy the prominent place in the canvas. In allotting to each subject its proper share of importance, there is scope for judgment, and discrimination, and comparison; and in the exercise of these faculties it will be best discerned whether we have really imbibed the spirit of Christ as our teacher, or whether a seeming outward likeness, without any transforming principle within, is the only fruit we have gained from a course of study in his school.

There can indeed be no doubt, that the confirmation of the truth of Christianity by the fulfilment of prophecy, must be at any stage of the church's existence an important branch of Christian preaching. But to bring forward this testimony as frequently as it occurs in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, would perhaps be more seasonable when it is first planted, than when it has already taken root, and has been watered, and has begun to bring forth its spiritual increase. The subject wisely formed almost the exclusive evidence dwelt on by our

Lord, because it was particularly appropriate for the conviction of the keepers of those sacred records to which appeal was made ; but were it to occupy as large a share in doctrinal discourses at the present day, the consequence would be that other proofs would be omitted which equally require to be enforced, and a part only would be brought forward, instead of the whole of the argument with which we are furnished in behalf of the Gospel. Other internal evidences will be urged with propriety, in proportion as we recede from the primitive times, and as the certainty that Christ was indeed the child of promise becomes more universal ; so that none who are in possession of the prophecies continue still to '*look for another,*' one infatuated race of people only excepted.

A similar caution should be observed in the use of some of the terms employed by our Lord.

For instance, the separation of the world into the two classes of Gentiles and Jews, which was then the current division, has probably

given a strength to some of the passages where they are set in strong opposition, which may render them unfit for general application in a society altogether formed of professing Christians. Those who are standing near the pale, may be excluded for ever by the offence taken at some incautious classification which seems to forget the shades and gradations of character which exists in a country where the Gospel has been preached for many centuries.

At the same time, the distinction which should always be preserved between those who have embraced it in *power*, and those who have only received it in *word*, must not be neutralized by taking away the broad line of demarcation which actually separates them. The worldly must be told *not to be conformed to this world*; and that since *the friendship of the world is enmity with God, whoever is the friend of the world is the enemy of God*. It is only meant to assert, that terms of strict propriety under the circumstances which originally gave birth to them, require to be strictly and prudently ex-

amined before they are pressed into a service for which they were not originally intended, and employed against objects situated very differently from those against whom our Lord directed them.

So too with regard to our Lord's charge to his apostles—'take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak'—it would be no less than presumptuous arrogance, amounting to a temptation of Providence, if we were to transfer the command without reservation or allowance from the first inspired propagators of the Gospel to their successors in the ministry at the present day.

The insufficiency of human means, in themselves, as well as the submission of worldly wisdom and finite reason to the mysteries of revelation, cannot be too strongly maintained; but if in our eagerness to establish these truths the real difference of cases be overlooked, we shall not only interpret Scripture erroneously,

but renounce the advantages which are legitimately open to us, under a sounder view of the true state of the question. The disciples went forth as unlearned and uncultivated men; expressly selected to be miraculous advocates of a cause, which, by the very evidence of their natural unfitness for such a commission, was to be shewn to be God's cause.

St. Paul too came to the Corinthians without the excellency of speech or of wisdom, for the express purpose of manifesting that the success of his ministry was not owing to the adventitious aid of eloquence, or ordinary attainments, but that it was the special 'testimony of God' to the truth of his preaching. In conformity therefore with this declared design, he calls them to witness that his address 'was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.'

But if the extraordinary gifts which signalized the infancy of the primitive church have

ceased with the necessity and design in which they originated, it cannot be pretended that we are to dispense with labours for which no substitute is now provided, or to undervalue the importance of human learning humbly dedicated to the service of Christianity, and sanctified, through God's blessing, to the promotion of his cause and glory. The sound of the Gospel must still go out into all lands ; but the Spirit now gives utterance, not as on the day of Pentecost, by conferring an immediate power of speaking in strange tongues, but by the secret influence of divine grace bestowed on natural means and ordinary opportunities of improvement.

Again, the silence of our Lord respecting particular vices might lead us to form very erroneous opinions respecting their criminality, did we not take into the account certain peculiarities incidental to the time and place of his ministry.

No precept occupies so large a space in the Mosaic code as the law against idolatry. It is

enacted in the most set and solemn terms, enforced with every argument which reverence or gratitude could suggest, repeated as often as obedience to it seems to have been relaxed by perversity or temptation, and guarded by the denunciation of penalties of the severest kind against those who despised its authority. Yet this fundamental law is scarcely noticed by our Lord, except perhaps by a quotation from Deuteronomy addressed to Satan, and in one or two passages of a similar tendency.

The commandment against sabbath-breaking is one which, considered with reference to its importance only, it might have been expected Christ would have sanctioned by an express direction, especially when the great body of ceremonial rites of the Levitical law were about to be abolished on the establishment of the new system. Other circumstances make our Lord's will respecting the observance of the sabbath not doubtful; but the only instances in which the Evangelists have recorded any remark on it from his own mouth, are where he vindicated

himself from supposed breaches of its sanctity by affirming his right to dispense with it in certain cases, and condemning the bigotry which would have hindered the performance of acts of mercy and love on the day of rest.

The Evangelists mention no direct law against usury; and other things, which are as much forbidden to a Christian as to a Jew, find no place in the recorded discourses of our Lord, though the Jewish legislator has thought it necessary to express their unlawfulness by repeated declarations.

What conclusion, then, should we draw from the silence of our Lord on these topics? Are we to conceive that idolatry and sabbath-breaking and usury are less offensive to God, who in these latter days hath spoken to us by his Son, than to God who in the old time spoke by the mouth of his servant Moses? or as he formerly suffered some things to remain, in consequence of the hardness of heart of the Israelites, has he now adopted the same course, with regard to

much weightier matters under a far more spiritual law?

There is, in fact, no difficulty in assigning a reason for the difference, without having recourse to any such suppositions, and we may derive from it an useful lesson. If Christ had seen that the direction which the wickedness of the times had taken, were such as to have required it, there can be no doubt that he would have left on record as strong denunciations against faults which he passed over without notice, as the Gospels actually contain against hypocrisy, and unbelief, and the other corruptions of the law which prevailed at his advent. The distinction, therefore, should be clearly marked between our Lord as a preacher of doctrine, and as a moralist. As a preacher of doctrine, the truths he taught were everlasting, and in due season all the ends of the world will hear the same terms of the same covenant proposed without one jot or tittle of alteration or omission. But as a moralist he addressed himself to the particular crimes in which his hearers most stood

in need of correction ; leaving an example to succeeding teachers to copy his discrimination, and to supply by analogy the want of positive precept as often as offences arose in the church which required exposure or suppression.

At the same time it must be acknowledged, that there is perhaps nothing by which the heavenly wisdom of our Saviour's ministry is more unequivocally shown, than by the universality of his preaching. Its very fitness for the cases of ourselves and of our children, as well as for our fathers through endless generations, has always and with reason been appealed to as one of the strongest internal evidences of its truth. He was not the prophet of a limited district, or of a particular period ; of one state of society, or of one form of civil government ; but of the whole world and of all ages, of every social and of every political community. With very few and unimportant exceptions, his discourses were not calculated for the meridian of Palestine alone, but for all nations under heaven to whom in progress of time the feet of them that bring

good tidings should arrive. There was nothing in them intended to gratify private curiosity, or to encourage frivolous and unedifying speculation. There was nothing provided exclusively for any separate class, or a more distinguished order of hearers. All was of obvious and of general utility. All was as applicable to the multitude in future generations, as it had been to the mixed concourse of people who composed his audience in the plains of Judea. As he had declared in the commencement of his ministry, that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to preach the Gospel *to the poor*, and had subsequently charged his disciples to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel *to every creature*, he became himself the first example of a teacher with whom was no respect of persons, and whose doctrines related indiscriminately to the interests and improvement of the whole race of mankind.

CHAPTER IV.

The Spirituality of the Ministry of Christ.

TO form a correct estimate of the value of Christ as a teacher, some general idea must be entertained of the situation of the world previous to his advent. Nothing can be more humiliating to the pride of human wisdom than the scriptural account of this matter.

If we look to that period during which a succession of men under the special influence of the Holy Spirit communicated to their nation the word of the Lord, no adequate advantage will appear to have been derived by the people at large from such direct intimations of his will. The prophet Isaiah describes the state which prevailed, as 'gross darkness.' He stigmatizes those whose duty it was to instruct and warn, as 'blind watchmen,'—'they were all ignorant,

they were all dumb dogs, they could not bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber'. The language of Nehemiah is equally strong in reproving the great corruption which the ecclesiastical state of Israel had suffered. 'A wonderful and terrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so'.

Proceeding from the prophetic times to the character of the world at the period of Christ's birth, we shall find a similar prevalence of error. Zacharias, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, declared that the 'day-spring from on high had visited the people, to give light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death'. John bears testimony that the light vouchsafed from above 'shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not'. The deep moral degradation which existed every where, and the wretched slavery in which men's

¹ Is. lx. 2. lvi. 10.

² Jer. v. 30, 31.

³ Luke, i. 78, 79.

⁴ John, i. 5.

minds were held, are constantly represented under the figures of blindness and captivity and night and death. St. Paul, who enters into particulars with some minuteness, shows that these expressive images were not too strong to describe the ignorance or illustrate the disorders into which the heathen world had fallen. 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves wise, they became fools.' And again, he calls upon the converts to the truth to 'walk henceforth not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart'.⁵ To such an extent were they misled by the delusions under which they laboured, that they mistook even the more obvious attributes of God, and confused in their minds what related to the province of reason, as much as what

⁵ Rom. i. 21, 22. Eph. iv. 17, 18.

belonged to the mysteries of revelation; they put evil for good, and good for evil, darkness for light, and light for darkness. St. Paul himself, though of the very strictest sect, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, 'verily thought with himself that he ought to do the things which he did,' while persecuting Jesus of Nazareth in the persons of his followers. And when a change had been wrought in his mind through divine grace, and the errors which had obscured his understanding were removed, he received a commission from God to the Gentiles for the express purpose of 'opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' In the same spirit, and with the same view of the state of degradation in which the world was sunk, St. Peter calls upon the believers to 'shew forth the praises of him who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.'

⁶ Acts, xvi. 18.

⁷ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

But although Scripture gives this humbling representation of the face of the world in a general view, it may be asked whether a remnant of a purer religion might not have been preserved among the philosophers of the more enlightened nations, previous to the promulgation of Christianity.

It was certainly the wish of the early Christians to enlist some of the Pagan writers among the teachers of evangelical truths. And even in later times it has been insinuated, 'that Plato began to write about the time when prophecy ceased; and that this was divinely contrived, in order to prepare the world for the Gospel by an intermediate teaching of most of its principles.'

There is at first sight something plausible in an idea which bears a close analogy to the mode in which it has pleased God in general to com-

³ See Dr. Ireland's 'Paganism and Christianity compared,' p. 242, &c. and 323, for an able and judicious examination of the claim set up by the admirers of Plato to the introduction of a doctrine by that philosopher hardly inferior to the doctrine of Christ and the apostles.

communicate successive revelations of his will to mankind, after adequate gradual preparation. But when we examine into the grounds upon which the hypothesis rests, there can be no doubt that the amount of Plato's knowledge of the Deity has been greatly overrated, as well by those whose design it was to depreciate holy writ, as by those who have injudiciously wished to borrow for Christianity the support and countenance of human wisdom. The supposed coincidence of Platonism with revelation will vanish when it is separated from the misrepresentations and additions of the followers of the Alexandrian school. Their object was to raise the character of philosophy by the secret aid of Christianity, adopting scriptural expressions and ideas, and attributing them to Plato by means of artful interpretations and a forced similitude of phrase⁹. On the whole, it may be safely concluded, even without having recourse to the

⁹ Among these, Ammonius and Plotinus appear to have been most diligent in their insidious attempts; and they were very successful in enlisting under their banners such as were sufficiently enlightened to be disgusted with the absurdities of polytheism, but who yet continued adverse to Christianity.

testimony of revelation, that there was nothing attained by the wisest and best of that people who erected an altar to the unknown God, which could supersede the necessity of divine teaching, or detract from the originality of our Lord as a preacher of spiritual truths.

Observation and inquiry, therefore, tend to confirm the unwelcome statement, which Scripture so unequivocally asserts, that *'the world by wisdom knew not God'*.

But in the midst of moral darkness, in the midst of the grossest mistakes respecting the object and the nature of religion, that true light began to shine which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. In pity to the ignorance that prevailed, Christ took upon himself the task of spiritualizing the worship paid to the Supreme Being, and gave a meaning and a purity to the precepts of the divine law, of which the corruptions of the Jewish teachers had long deprived

them. The preparatory dispensation under which man was taught to *live by sight*, had proved inadequate to raise his affections to true holiness, and therefore in the fulness of time Christ came, the minister of a better covenant. For 'that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual'. Hence it became a part of the office of that holy instructor, to remove the errors of those who taught for doctrine the commandments of men, and to introduce a criterion of purity and perfection, of which the world had previously no conception.

1 Cor. xv. 46. "An appeal directed wholly to the better part, to the spirit of man; to motives, and hopes, and faculties of a character altogether *spiritual*, refined, and unseen; appears to have been reserved, until the *ministration of death* and condemnation, *put to proof, and found wanting*, might itself stand forth, in its wreck and insufficiency, an additional and most convincing argument, that to *live by sight* is not the way to conquer the perverse will, nor to bring the heart of man unto that *extent* of obedience and of purity, of which, even in this present life, God is pleased to make it capable."—Miller's Bampton Lectures, p. 41.

In fact, our Lord's discourses all tend to show, that *God, who is a spirit, must be worshipped in spirit, and in truth*, and that we must not *draw nigh and honour him with our lips, while our hearts are far from him*. But it was the special design of the longest of his recorded sermons to free the moral law from the glosses and traditions with which it had been encumbered by those blind guides, who, instead of being the guardians of the commandment once delivered unto them, had become its corruptors. Considering it merely in this light, without any reference to its value as a manual of practical piety, it is of peculiar importance as a model for a Christian preacher in its specification of the holy dispositions and graces which, cultivated together, and cherished by a daily and progressive growth, make *the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works*. This is the moral superstructure which it is the peculiar province of the Gospel to establish on that foundation which was laid in Christ.

Indeed, were it necessary to single out any one particular excellence, as the characteristic

feature of the sermon on the mount, it would seem to be spirituality, as distinguished from the lifeless and formal teaching of the scribes and expounders of the law. There is nothing in it but what is grave, edifying, important, befitting alike the character of the speaker, and the condition of the hearers. It comes stamped with all the official weight of a divine interpretation of divine precepts. It remains as the authorized exposition of the manner in which God intends his own word to be understood; and from the mode of instruction here adopted on those subjects into which our Lord enters, it is safe to reason analogically respecting the points on which revelation is silent.

Yet this discourse has met with a singular reception. Either its value in a general point of view, as a pattern of spiritual comment on the divine will, has been depreciated owing to a misunderstanding of the circumstances under which it was delivered,—or it has been unduly magnified by an exclusive preference and veneration to the detriment of other parts of Holy

Scripture. While some, overlooking the fact that the apostles were not yet chosen from among the disciples, have supposed its precepts to be addressed solely to the apostles, and to be binding on them alone, others, on the contrary, have denied that any doctrine or command which is not contained in it, can be obligatory on Christians at large, or essential to be received by them.

This is not the place to inquire into the consequences arising from either of these errors; but it may not be superfluous to remark, that one of the greatest obligations which the world owes to Christ, considered merely in his office as a teacher, is the new criterion which he has afforded in this discourse for forming a moral judgment on men and things,—the new touchstone which he has appointed for the trial of the human conduct, by spiritualizing the dispositions of the heart, and directing attention to propensities and motives, as well as to overt actions. Hence it has arisen that there are certain moral precepts, as well as the sublimer doctrines of the Gospel, which are due to reve-

lation, and can be learnt through that medium alone;

The law of retaliation has been held allowable by all nations, and even the Mosaic code established the legitimacy of the principle by enjoining the sacrifice of 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But what is the language of the 'teacher sent from God?' 'I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain³.'

Again; the Jewish doctors sanctioned the indulgence of hatred, provided only it were cherished against an enemy—but *the exceeding broad commandment* of God, as it is well termed by the Psalmist, inculcates not the love of friends only, a feeling which might be prompted

³ Matt. v. 38—41.

by the innate affections of human nature even in its fallen state, but the forgiveness and love even of our very foes and persecutors. 'I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ⁴.'

So too that *old commandment* which the Jews had from the beginning, was so enlarged in respect of extent, by the better promises through which it was renewed, and the example given for its fulfilment, that our Lord does not hesitate to call it a *new commandment*, though not actually so, either in letter or effect ⁵.

To the same source, and to that alone, must be ascribed that preference of humility and lowliness to honour and distinction which the Gospel inculcates throughout; as well as that injunction to repress an overweening affection for earthly objects, which is so contrary to the line

⁴ Matt. v. 43—48.

⁵ John, xiii. 34, compared with 1 John, ii. 7, 8.

of policy suggested by the wisdom of merely human instructors⁶

The doctrines alluded to, the distinctive and peculiar doctrines of Christian morality, emanated exclusively from Him who is the source of all spiritual life and knowledge; and ecclesiastical history supplies abundant examples of that purer tone of conduct which was early introduced into social life by the action of such heavenly-minded principles. It was under such an influence that the Christians at Carthage came forward with alacrity at the call of Cyprian, to bury those who had died of the plague, when the pagans had an opportunity of contrasting the effects of the love of God with their own unspiritual selfishness and inhumanity. 'It was on this occasion,' says Milner, 'that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Christians to show the practical superiority of their religion The rich contributed largely; the poor gave what they could; namely, their labour with ex-

⁶ 1 John, ii. 15. James, iv. 4.

treble hazard of their lives; the pagans saw with astonishment the effects of the love of God in Christ.⁷ The same historian remarks on another occasion, when Flavian, the aged and infirm bishop of Antioch, had undertaken a perilous journey to Constantinople, to plead with the emperor in behalf of the citizens who had been led into sedition, that even monks who exhibited Christianity in a degenerate form, excelled in benevolence and active virtue the boasted and boasting sons of philosophy⁸.

Another happy fruit of our Lord's doctrine was, that liberality to the poor which was so characteristic a part of the practice of believers, and which could only have had its origin in a religion bringing the whole race of mankind into one bond of union, whereby the world at large was taught to consider all men as brethren, and to do good to all without distinction of persons. 'The Jews,' says Milner, in his

⁷ Milner's Church History, vol. i. p. 421.

⁸ Vol. ii. 281. See also pp. 105. 283. 483. 517; and Ireland's Lectures, pp. 113. 130. 206.

Church History, 'were a very selfish, hard-hearted people; the Gentiles lived in luxury and splendour, if they could; but care for the poor seems to have made no part of their jurisprudence, nor to have been at all a fashionable virtue. I never could learn that philosophers, though they harangued incessantly concerning virtue, either much recommended or practised any kindness to the bulk of mankind,—that is, the slaves and vulgar. Indeed, their precepts are particularly directed to the higher ranks, and they seem to forget that the lower orders belonged to the human species. An hospital, an almshouse, or any similar provision for the poor, was unknown in the pagan and philosophic world. But when the religion of Him who is no respecter of persons began to gain ground, the barbarous spirit of aristocracy lost its dominion among Christians, though it still prevailed in the manners of the rest of mankind. Christians felt themselves all sinners—all in the sight of God on a level⁹.

⁹ Milner's Church Hist. i. 519.

But the spiritual character of our Lord appears to shine in its brightest lustre when it is placed in contrast with the slow understandings and gross conceptions of those around him. No line of argument can show more distinctly, that whoever comes to Christ as a teacher, will find at every step he takes, that he more and more requires the aid of spiritual discernment.

The Jews, through their deficiency in this respect, continually mistook the meaning of our Lord's discourses, although delivered in language rendered familiar to them by their own prophetic writings, and often expressly accommodated to their national prejudices and associations. We shall look in vain out of Scripture for an explanation of the remarkable fact, that men, circumstanced as were the scribes and teachers of the law, could attribute *the words of truth and soberness*, to the ravings of madness or the power of Satanic influence. But the Bible at once removes the difficulty; and we see in a circumstance so contrary to all reasonable expectation, only a new and humiliating illustra-

tion of a truth for which we are indebted to revealed religion alone—that ‘the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned’¹.

Nor is it sufficient to allege that it was not given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; since the intentional obscurity in which our Lord often veiled his meaning, when speaking before them of some of the deeper points of his doctrine, was nothing but a penal infliction to which they were subjected for their wilful blindness. He had formerly spoken to them in the clearest manner, he had wrought miracles in their presence to convince them of the source from which he derived his authority, his Father himself had commanded attention to his preaching by a voice from heaven;—but they had perverted their natural powers, and abused their external advantages, and

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

therefore God withheld from them any further communication of knowledge, and judicially closed their ears against the report of the Gospel. 'Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand; and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them².'

It was owing to this desertion on the part of God, that the Jewish hearers of our Lord exhibit in the sacred history so awful a specimen of the native scepticism of the human heart, and of the proud and unteachable spirit of man, when unenlightened by divine grace. Even Nico-

² Matt. xiii. 13—15.

demos, the most candid of them, and sincerely desirous of knowing what was truth, was not entirely exempt from the prejudice of his countrymen, of which an instance occurs in his incredulity respecting the doctrine of the new birth. The burthens derived from tradition with which their religious worship was encumbered,—their mistaken notions respecting the Messiah's kingdom and person³,—the low and

³ It may be sufficient to hint briefly at a few of those misconceptions, of which traces may be perceived in Scripture. The Jews believed from Dan. vii. 13, 14, that Christ would descend visibly from heaven, and destroy the Roman power,—an idea alluded to Matt. xvi. 1. Mark, viii. 11. Rom. x. 6, 1 Cor. i. 22. They believed from Dan. ii. 44, that Christ would abide with them for ever, John, xii. 34. Luke, xxiv. 21. Rom. x. 7.—from Is. lx. 3, that the Gentiles would be enlightened with the knowledge of the true God by the Jews converting them to Judaism, which is confuted by St. Paul, Gal. iii. 16.—from Jer. xxxi. 35, that all Israel should have their part in the world to come, Luke, xiii. 22.—from Gen. xlix. 10, 11, and Is. xxi. 12, that Israel should be saved, and the other nations of the world destroyed by the Messiah, refuted John, iii. 17.—from a misapplication of Is. lxxv. 13, that they should live with the Messiah in the garden of Eden. The Jews also maintained that Elias would come in his own person. Hence our Lord says, with reference to the inveteracy of this prejudice, '*If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.*' More imme-

unworthy interpretations which they put on the figurative language of their own scriptures,—all had their origin in want of spirituality, and prove the justice of our Lord's charge, that they were earthly in their conceptions and natures.

Not unfrequently, indeed, the perverseness of their misapprehensions would appear to savour of puerile simplicity, rather than of mere ignorance. When Christ enforced the necessity of *eating his flesh, and drinking his blood*, they understood him to speak in a literal sense of his

diately with reference to our Lord himself, they believed that he should be born at Bethlehem, and be concealed till Elias should come to anoint him, or at least that his parentage should be unknown, John, vii. 27.—that he should immediately accomplish peace on earth, Luke, xii. 49—51.—that he could not be a man, John, v. 18. x. 33. 1 John, v. 5. Mark, xiv. 61.—that he should not be in a mean condition, but should have a temporal kingdom. Mark, xv. 31.—that he should not be born of a woman in the helpless state of an infant, John, vii. 27.—that he should not be subject to the miseries incidental to man,—and, on the other hand, that he should be a mere man of the stock and lineage of David, and not the Son of God, refuted by our Lord himself, Luke, xxi. 41. Such is a sample of the absurdities and contradictions into which those fell who were left through their own perverseness to a strong delusion that they should believe a lie.

natural body, and asked, *How can this man give us his flesh to eat*⁴? When he taught them that one of the privileges of his disciples consisted in spiritual freedom from sin, they conceived he meant freedom from civil servitude, and retorted upon him that Abraham's seed were never in bondage to any man⁵. When he declared, that those who kept his sayings should never see death, they accused him of madness for promising his followers exemption from the common lot of mankind, and interpreted his words to imply a temporal privilege which not even their federal father, the head of their nation, had been suffered to enjoy⁶. When he spoke of withdrawing himself to a place whither they would not be able to follow him, however much their approaching miseries might tend to make them desire it, their minds were so engrossed with this present world, that they scornfully inquired, whether he meant to 'kill himself,' because he said, 'whither I go ye cannot come'. Well might our Saviour be moved

⁴ John, vi. 52—58.

⁵ John, viii. 32—36.

⁶ John, viii. 51—59.

⁷ John, viii. 21—24.

with compassion for the people, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd, while the very masters in Israel knew not the Lord's anointed, and cast the spirit of his doctrines behind them.

But it may be objected, that though the Jews at large exhibited so much blindness, yet the more immediate followers and disciples of Jesus received his instructions in so different a manner, that an especial blessing is pronounced on them for the superior intelligence and heavenly-mindedness which they displayed. '*Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear*'⁸.

Yet if the apostles rise in our estimation when brought into comparison with the rebellious and stiff-necked people, who believed none of the truths of the Gospel, how little will their highest attainments bear to be contrasted with him to whom the Spirit was not given by mea-

⁸ Matt. xiii. 16.

sure. How often must he have mourned in secret, like St. Paul over the Corinthians⁹, that he could not speak to them as unto spiritual, but as carnal. How often must he have prayed his heavenly Father to give them the spirit of wisdom and grace, that they 'might be filled with all spiritual understanding'. How must his soul have been vexed from day to day, while they were fools and slow of heart to believe, and filled with perplexities and doubts at all that they saw and heard. How must he have sorrowed at the number of those who were offended at his hard sayings, and desisted from their attendance on him.

Hence it is that Christ frequently complains of the ignorance in spiritual matters with which he had to contend. 'He saith unto them, are ye so without understanding also?' 'Why reason ye because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes see ye not, and having ears

⁹ 1 Cor. iii. 1.

¹ Col. i. 9.

hear ye not ; and do ye not remember? O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?² And even after his resurrection, he upbraided the eleven 'with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them that had seen him after that he was risen³.' Their astonishment at every renewed display of Christ's power shewed how little conviction the many signs and wonders they had witnessed had wrought upon their minds. Their prejudices were rather vanquished in spite of themselves by the accumulation of irresistible proofs of his divine authority, than subdued at once by the durable and convincing impression of some individual miracle. On the evening of the very day on which our Lord had fed the multitude of five thousand with five loaves, his disciples were 'sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered' at the manifestation of his power on the winds and the sea. 'For,' says the Evangelist, 'they considered not the

² Mark, vii. 18. viii. 17, 18. ix. 19.

³ Mark, xvi. 14.

miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened.⁴

In particular, the prophetic declarations respecting the Messiah seem to have been a stumbling-block to them; and they were slow to perceive how they received their accomplishment in their master, till, after his glorification, their minds had been gradually opened, according to promise⁵, by the teaching of the Comforter. 'These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him⁶.

In fact, that very insight which the apostles gained into their master's dispensation after his death, shewed how much they had previously stood in need of being quickened to a spiritual apprehension of the nature of the service in which they had engaged. The true meaning of

⁴ Mark, vi. 52.

⁵ John, xiv. 26. xvi. 15.

⁶ John, xii. 16.

many actions which they had witnessed in ignorance or misconception, was then cleared up, according to the assurance given to them—
'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter'.⁷

When our Lord addressed Judas so significantly at the table, after he had dipped the sop, and given it him, 'no man' at that time 'knew for what intent he spake this unto him;' but afterwards the full import of those remarkable words occurred to their minds in all its force, as indicative of the perfect knowledge which Christ had of all the sufferings he was to undergo, and of the steady composure with which he contemplated them.

During the transfiguration, when three of the disciples were selected to be the witnesses of this sublime manifestation of the glory to which their Lord was to be exalted, they so far mistook the intention of the display, that Peter, not

⁷ John, xiii. 7.

knowing what he said, and ignorant that the sacrifice was not yet offered on which the redemption of the world depended, would have detained our Saviour from going down again to meet the sufferings which it behoved him to bear⁸.

It was the same defective view of Christ's dignity which induced Philip to ask, after having been so long conversant with his character and pretensions—'Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father?' The Apostle was enabled to attain a much clearer knowledge of Christ's being the *express image of his Father*, before he preached Jesus to the Æthiopian eunuch⁹.

Even in one of the last and most affectionate discourses which our Saviour held with his dis-

⁸ Luke, ix. 33.

⁹ John, xiv. 8, 9. Acts, viii. 35.

ciples, the candour of the Evangelist who narrates it informs us of four gross misapprehensions of his meaning¹. Their minds were far from being yet fixed on heavenly things, when they believed in Christ's temporal kingdom—when they contended amongst themselves for precedency in it—when they remained ignorant of the necessity of his death and passion—or of the intended calling of the Gentiles to the privileges of salvation.

In fact, it was against the disciples, that some of our Lord's strongest rebukes were directed. Besides his reproof of Peter, hereafter to be noticed, *he turned and rebuked James and John* for want of meekness, and said, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*. And again he says, doubtless partly with reference to the unbelief of his disciples which disabled them from casting out an evil spirit from a lunatic, *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?*

¹ John, xiv. &c.

Thus too he was *much displeased* with them when they would not suffer the little children to come unto him, and intimated, that of such, rather than of those who forbad them, was the kingdom of heaven peopled².

It seems, indeed, not unreasonable to suppose, that the *contradiction of sinners* formed a principal ingredient in our Saviour's cup of misery. In proportion as he was spiritual himself, he would feel more acutely the want of a corresponding sentiment in the hearts of his followers. His devotion to his Father's service would render him peculiarly alive to the guilt of those who obstructed by their obstinate unbelief the progress of his kingdom,—his intimate acquaintance with his Father's will must have filled him with sorrow for the ignorance in which the world was lying,—and his knowledge that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, would lead him to view with mingled pity and indignation the hypocritical and formal

² Luke, ix. 55. Matt. xvii. 17. Mark, x. 13—15.

homage which had been substituted in the place of the inward circumcision of the heart.

The manner in which he vindicated the sanctity of the temple from the mercenary business by which it had been profaned, especially when contrasted with the general meekness of our Lord's character, shewed how he was 'grieved when he beheld the transgressors, because they kept not God's word³.' No warmth which he displayed ever arose from merely personal feelings. Though his righteous soul was vexed day by day with their ungodly deeds, yet he possessed his spirit in patience, and the reproaches addressed to himself were left unregarded and unanswered,—or if it were necessary to refute such slanders as would have prejudiced the success of his ministry, it was done in a spirit of gentleness forming the best comment on his own declaration, that 'he sought not his own glory⁴.' But the case is different, when he is *eaten up with the zeal of his Father's house*.

³ Ps. cxix. 168.

⁴ John, viii. 50.

‘ He made a scourge of small cords, and drove out all them that bought and sold in the temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changer’s money, and overthrew the tables⁵.’

And if our Lord’s nature revolted thus instinctively from whatever had the least tendency to unholiness, how must he have felt the humiliation to which he was subjected, when abandoned in the wilderness to the temptation of the devil. If our Lord was moved with such holy indignation at the sight of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, if he wept through the bitterness of his sympathy over misguided Jerusalem, how must his soul have been grieved when he heard the eternal enemy of the human race, the author of all their miseries, assaulting his ear with blasphemies, and summoning up with deadly though impotent rage all his artifices, to exert them in one last effort against the incarnate son of God himself. Perhaps too we may conclude from the expression of one of the

⁵ John, ii. 15—17.

Evangelists,—‘ then the devil departed from him *for a season*’—that these attacks were renewed at a moment when from the view of his approaching sufferings our Lord’s human frame would be least enabled to contend with them, and that the assaults of Satan formed the principal part of his moral trial during the agony in the garden. The abhorrence with which our Saviour turned from the evil suggestions of his enemy is strongly marked in the indignant rebuke which he uttered on a subsequent occasion to Peter, when that apostle shewed that he had no proper value for spiritual things. ‘ *Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me ; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*’⁶.

There is still another consideration which will contribute to place our Lord’s spirituality in a strong light.

The multitudes who formed his occasional audiences were struck with nothing more than

⁶ Matt. xvi. 23.

with the edifying nature of his discourses. They ‘wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and said, from whence hath this man these things, and what wisdom is this which is given unto him.’ They contrasted, greatly to the disadvantage of their own privileged instructors, the serious and heavenly tendency of his doctrine, with the vain and wretched trifling which distinguished the conversation of the doctors of the law. ‘The people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.’ On one occasion our Lord declares the cause of this difference in a very pointed manner, and shews that by a kind of moral impossibility, they could not speak good and holy things to which their hearts were strangers. ‘O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh? A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things.’

7 Matt. xii. 34, 35.

But on the part of our Lord, whether discoursing with his disciples, or with the people, or with the Pharisees, his topics were always chosen with a reference to the object of his ministry. The disciples were enlightened by more intimate communication of the secret purposes which he was sent to fulfil—the people were exhorted to repent and receive the Messiah—the Pharisees were warned to flee from the wrath to come. Instead of settling trivial disputes, or deciding subtle questions, or gratifying speculative curiosity, he taught the nature of universal righteousness towards God and man,—the true principles of holiness,—the connexion between the doctrines of the new covenant and the practice of believers,—the method of reconciliation between God and man,—the obligations of the redeemed to have their ‘conversation in heaven, from whence also they looked for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ’⁸.

Now to appreciate the excellence of the teaching of Christ, these sublime and spiritual

⁸ Phil. iii. 20.

topics should be compared with the defective philosophy of the heathens, or with the absurdities and immoralities of the Koran, or even with the preparatory dispensation revealed to the Israelites, and committed to their keeping.

The excellence of the Jewish law was indeed justly extolled by Moses. 'This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this land which I set before you this day?' Yet we know that the higher mysteries of Christ's kingdom were shrouded from their view, like the face of their lawgiver himself, under a veil of figures and metaphors. The sight which Moses obtained of God was purposely rendered dark and indistinct—he saw as it were only 'his back parts.' And yet the knowledge of the divine mysteries enjoyed by

* Deut. iv. 6, 7.

* 1 Kings. iv. 33.

him and by the prophets, was much more explicit than that which was vouchsafed to the Jewish nation at large; so that the religious knowledge of the people was far from being on a level with the views entertained by the inspired writers themselves. The Jews, as a people, knew little of the nature of God, of the plan of acceptance with him, of a future state of rewards and punishments.

But since the manifestation of the true light, 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' 'Now hath Christ obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house, hath more honour than the house².'

² 2 Cor. iv. 6. Heb. viii. 6. iii. 3.

In truth, throughout the whole of the things recorded by the Evangelists respecting Jesus, whether we find him sitting down in the midst of assembled multitudes collected to hear his doctrine, or retiring apart with his disciples to explain what he had spoken to others in parables; whether amongst friends or enemies, at the last supper, or before Pilate; in prayer to his heavenly Father, or questioning the doctors in the temple, new and convincing illustrations are afforded in each situation of the truth of that saying—*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

Nor should it be forgotten, that the spirituality of our Lord was manifested in his practice, as well as in precept.

Before he entered on his public ministry, Satan was permitted to make trial of the nature of his self-devotion. ‘All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then

said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan³. The same feeling was evinced in his conveying himself away from the multitude who would have made him a king; and in the manner in which he profited by the remarks of the disciples on the stones of the temple, the beauty of which they had pointed out to him. But Christ, as Fenelon remarks, had seen his Father's house, and could not, therefore, be taken with the glory of the earthly structure. He seizes the opportunity of leading their minds from the admiration of its exterior splendour, to contemplate the certainty of its approaching destruction. 'There shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down⁴.' Such was the holy consistency of him who left us an example that we should follow his steps, and, at the same time, a command that we should walk as he also walked.

This subject suggests important practical inferences.

³ Matt. iv. 8—10.

⁴ Matt. xxiv. 2.

1. The ministers and stewards of Christ's mysteries have need daily to pray their Lord, that the '*same mind may be in them which was in Christ Jesus.*' The question of our Saviour to Nicodemus,—‘Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things’—teaches the responsibility which attaches to the clergy in this respect. It is expected of them beyond all others, that they should not be ignorant of those *spiritual* truths—for it is to them that the context particularly refers—which the revelation of the Gospel has disclosed to man, and which they are set apart for the especial purpose of enforcing.

Our own church has been formerly charged with remissness in this matter. Leighton, says Burnet, thought the Church of England looked like the fair carcase of a body without a spirit, —without that zeal, that strictness of life, and that laboriousness in the clergy that became them⁵. This made him study to excite in his

⁵ Hist. of His Own Times, i. 589.

clergy a greater sense of spiritual feelings and of the care of souls. In another place where Burnet bears witness to the learning and labours of the reformed pastors, he laments the decay of the vitals of Christianity⁶. Indeed, the whole of the account of his own times presents a melancholy picture of the prevailing temper of the English clergy in his day. Political sourness seems to have been the characteristic of the church. Parties ran so high during these unsettled times, that it would have been, perhaps, difficult for any set of men to have prevented the intrusion of secular feelings and partialities into the sacred office. Milner has, with much justice, compared this period with the state of the primitive church, from the death of Dionysius to the end of the third century⁷. There was in both these periods the same declension in spiritual feeling, the same prevalence of private animosities, the same unsubdued love of the world, accompanied with much learning and external morality in the public ministra-

⁶ Hist. of His Own Times, i. 687. ii. 638.

⁷ Church History, i. 501.

tions of the pastors. He whose lot is cast in times when the succession is undisputed, has great reason to be thankful that Providence has exempted him from the entanglements of disturbed nations, whenever he reflects on the struggles for ecclesiastical power—the unchristian dislike shewn to Papists and dissenters—the want of cordiality even among the members of the same church, which so shamefully distinguished the clergy about the period of the Revolution.

But the failings of the fathers may at least serve to teach their children wisdom. They may remind those who have the charge of the flock of Christ to examine well the state of their spiritual affections, and to see whether they are animated by that deep sense of the importance of religious truth, which can alone produce a corresponding impression on their people. The experience of all who are acquainted with the nature of parochial ministrations will agree in the necessity of labouring to excite a serious spirit in a congregation, without which even in-

creased knowledge and purer morality are but unsatisfactory proofs of a real progress in vital religion. A systematic delivery of the doctrines of the Gospel is essentially requisite to the formation and gradual development of Christian principles ; but it must be accompanied by many an earnest prayer for the effusion of some portion of that divine grace which in primitive times added to the church in one day three thousand souls. Knowledge, if not rightly directed, and rendered influential, frequently becomes destructive. Its inutility for the advancement of true religion was never more strongly exemplified than in the times of the Commonwealth. The really useful person in winning souls to Christ, is he who is so penetrated with the value of the doctrines of the Gospel, as to persuade by the zeal and sincerity of his manner, when a less earnest mode of teaching would have failed to convince. When prejudices are to be overcome, or ignorance to be removed, it is necessary first to shew that the man who labours to introduce new modes of feeling and thinking is not only the convert of his own opi-

nions, but an example of their practical efficacy in forming a spiritual character.

2. It is clear that the giver of a law so spiritual as that which Christ promulgated, must himself expect to be served with a spiritual obedience. *'God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'*⁸.

We are commanded not to approach God with 'carnal sacrifices,' but to 'offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ⁹.' And if this caution were necessary in the apostolical age, it seems to be much more reasonable in the present state of the Christian world. Men are liable to particular defects in particular situations. During the first ages of Christianity, when the new religion was embraced by a small part of the population, and its followers were obliged to meet together secretly for fear of their opponents, their numbers were not likely to be swelled by any who were not

⁸ John, iv. 24.

⁹ 1 Pet. ii. 5.

prepared to prefer the service of God to the indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, and to renounce their worldly interests for the sake of the Gospel. When martyrdom is the price paid for adherence to religious opinions, none but those who have counted the cost will be found to incur the danger.

But the case is different in a country where Christianity is the law of the land, and where all the disabilities and penalties are on the side of dissent from the current belief. It may then be feared, that even where two or three are gathered together, motives of a less pure and disinterested nature may have contributed to their assembling, than influenced the disciples when they met by stealth and at the hazard of their lives in the secrecy of an upper chamber. Perhaps too stated services, however necessary for the maintenance of true religion, may have a tendency to produce in some minds a cold and formal worship.

Yet if these be evils inseparable from what forms in other respects our happiest blessing

and privilege, it is incumbent on us to guard, as far as possible, against their injuring the spirituality of our character. As we recede farther from the apostolical times, we must labour to restore the draft of Christianity to its original purity, and to renew a lively feeling of religion wherever the lapse of ages has insensibly suffered it to decline. Even Mosheim doubts whether the interests of true religion did not lose something by the accession of the philosophers and learned men who were converted in the course of the second century¹. The simplicity of truth, unadorned with ‘persuasive words of man’s wisdom,’ began through their means to be gradually corrupted, and a false taste was introduced into religion, little calculated to elevate the heart, and fix its desires on heavenly things. We must quicken our affections by frequent meditation on the astonishing love of God—we must enliven and promote the fervency of our devotions by a deep conviction of the indispensable necessity of seeking through prayer

¹ Mosheim, i. 126.

the assistance of divine grace, so that, like Simeon, we too may *come by the Spirit* as it were *into the temple*—we must purify ourselves daily with renewed zeal and humiliation, that our hearts may become fit temples for the reception of the Holy Spirit. We must search the disposition, and try the tempers of our souls, lest there be any wickedness in them which, however it may elude the notice of man, will not escape the detection of him who knoweth the very secrets of our hearts, and spieth out all our ways. We must pray that the Holy Spirit may prosper his own work, by progressively forming within us a new nature, so that ‘the inward man may be renewed day by day in knowledge after the image of Christ’².

3. Let us remember that the spirituality of our minds is the test of their true Christian character. ‘If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God’³.

² Col. iii. 10.

³ Rom. viii. 9, 14.

And again, in another place, the Gospel itself under which we live, is called, by a particular distinction, ‘ the ministration of the Spirit ‘.

Each individual, therefore, is called upon to inquire for himself, by serious self-examination, whether he is walking worthy of his calling in this respect. A worldly state of mind is not less destructive of true holiness, than gross sin. The heart is so deceitful that it requires continual watching, lest it be corrupted willingly; and, at the same time, it is often so weak, that there is need of no less caution, lest it be led astray unawares. Now heavenly-mindedness, in the full sense of the word, includes a subjection of every thought to the will of God—the surrender of the affections to him—a deliberate preference of an eternal good to temporal advantages—purity of intention—abstraction from the world in the Scriptural sense of the term—separation from low and secular ends—in a word, the daily remembrance of that work which,

though it can only be perfected in another state of being, must have its commencement here, the union of the soul with God.

None who have this object in view will rest satisfied with low attainments in spirituality. They will bear in mind that comprehensive sentence of St. John—‘ Every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure^s.’ And if in the apostolical age it appeared necessary to exhort believers to ‘ give diligence to make their calling and election sure,’ it cannot now be thought unreasonable to remind every one that hath in him a hope of salvation, that as it was said of Christ himself that he waxed daily and grew in stature, so should we aspire after progressive communications of the Spirit, *till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

^s 1 John, iii. 3.

And since in proportion as we recede from the primitive age of Christianity, we become more liable to deviate from the simplicity of primitive truth, the state of our affections and the integrity of our belief must be tried by the balance of the sanctuary. The Spirit that is in us must be put to the test, to see whether it be of Christ, or whether it has suffered debasement in that necessary connexion which every one must hold with men of worldly temper, in the course of his secular pursuits. We must weigh well the full force and import of those remarkable scriptural expressions which denote spiritual communion with God. *Enoch and Noah walked with God. Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, walking in all the ordinances of the law blameless. God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. What communion hath light with darkness, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? They that be after the Spirit, do mind the things of the Spirit. That ye may be filled with all the fulness of God. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*

Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his⁶.

All these texts shew the nature of which those must partake whose 'fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.' They present a high and holy standard of spiritual attainments, the fruit of much prayer and watchfulness and self-examination. For the more we meditate on them, and on the whole tenor of Christ's spiritual character, the more we shall learn practically, by the contrast which our own hearts exhibit, how much man has fallen from the image of God, and how much our natures must be changed and elevated and purified, before we can be holy as he is holy, and perfect as he is perfect.

⁶ Gen. v. 24. vi. 9. Luke, i. 6. 2 Cor. vi. 14, 16. Rom. viii. 5. Eph. iii. 19. Phil. ii. 5. Rom. xiii. 14. viii. 9.

CHAPTER V.

The gradual Teaching of Christ.

It appears to have been the practice of St. Paul, when instructing the primitive converts, to make large use of a certain discretionary power, in gradually unfolding the higher mysteries of the Gospel to the recently associated members of the churches. He writes to the Corinthians— ‘We speak wisdom among them *that are perfect*¹,’ those who were so advanced in elemen-

¹ Τῶς τελικοῦς in opposition to the catechumens. The distinction maintained in the primitive church between these two orders deserves to be remarked in connexion with my present subject. ‘The *Fideles* had their peculiar privileges in the church, above the catechumens. For, first, it was their sole prerogative to partake of the Lord’s table, and communicate with one another in the symbols of Christ’s body and blood at the altar. Another of their prerogatives above catechumens, was to stay and join with the ministers in all the prayers of the church, which the catechumens were not allowed to do More particularly the use of the Lord’s prayer was the sole prerogative of the πιστοί, or *believers*; for

tary knowledge, and so matured in judgment and spirituality, as to be proper recipients of the

then it was no crime, or argument of weakness, or want of the spirit, to use it; but an honour and privilege of the most consummate and perfect Christians. The catechumens were not allowed to say, 'Our Father,' till they had first made themselves sons by regeneration in the waters of baptism. This is expressly said by St. Chrysostom, St. Austin, Theodoret, and several others; and for this reason Chrysostom calls it, *ἡ προσευχή των πιστων*; and St. Austin, *Oratio Fidelium*, the prayer of the regenerate or believers, because it was their privilege and birth-right. Lastly, they were admitted to be auditors of all discourses made in the church, even those that treated of the most abstruse points and profound mysteries of the Christian religion; which the catechumens were strictly prohibited from hearing. The catechumens were allowed to hear the Scriptures, and the ordinary popular discourses that were made upon them; which was no more than what some councils allow even to Jews and Gentiles: for in those discourses they never treated plainly of their mysteries, but in such a covert way that the catechumens could not understand them. But when the catechumens were dismissed, then they discoursed more openly of their mysteries before the *Fideles*, whose privilege it was to be the sole auditors of such discourses. This we learn from St. Ambrose, who says, his common discourses to the unbaptized were only on points of morality; but when they were baptized, then was the time to open to them the mysteries and sacraments of religion; to have discoursed to them of those things before, had been more like exposing mysteries than explaining them. St. Austin speaks to the same purpose in one of his sermons to the newly-baptized.' &c. &c.—Bingham's *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Book I. Chap. iv. Sect. 5—8.

deep things contained in heavenly wisdom. Again, he thus answers those who complained of his refraining from the abstruse subjects which formed the principal topics of the ministrations of the false teachers — ‘I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able ².’ And again,—‘Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil ³.’

In all these passages such a method of teaching is clearly implied, as had respect to the gradual advancement of the believers in spiritual knowledge; so that the Apostle gave ‘here a little, and there a little,’ not displaying all the truths he knew to those to whom they would have been ‘foolishness’ at that stage of their experience in religion ⁴.

² 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

³ Heb. v. 14.

⁴ See Thruston’s Twelve Discourses, p. 12—14.

Now the question is, how far St. Paul was justified in this particular by the example of our Saviour.

If the argument from analogy be taken into consideration, it must be admitted, that it will afford a strong authority in favour of the Apostle's practice. From the time of the first promise of a redeemer, given immediately after the fall, when it was simply declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, a series of successive prophecies gradually unfolded the particular tribe, the family, the individual house from which the Messiah should spring—the time and place of his birth—the minutest circumstances of his life—the scope of his mission—the qualifications with which he should be endowed for sustaining his mediatorial office.

In consequence of these several revelations, which were all understood to point clearly at a certain specified character about to arise at a definite season, a general expectation of the ad-

vent of some great prophetic teacher was excited among the Jews, which had a tendency to prepare their minds for the proper reception of the truths he would be commissioned to deliver. Accordingly we find that little more than a century and a half before our Lord's birth, they pulled down an altar which the heathen had profaned, and 'laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them⁵.' And at a subsequent period in the history, when the high priesthood was conferred on Simon and his posterity after him, a very remarkable reservation was made, with evident reference to the prevailing expectation of a heavenly teacher. 'The Jews and priests were well pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest for ever, until there should arise a faithful prophet⁶.' It was in allusion to this universal opinion, that when our Lord began to display the powers with which he was invested, the people said, 'that a great

⁵ 1 Maccab. iv. 46.

⁶ 1 Maccab. xiv. 41.

prophet had risen up amongst them, and that the Lord had visited his people⁷.

Nor was this all. When the season for Christ's appearance had arrived, a harbinger was expressly sent to prepare the way before him, and to declare that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; through whose ministry a great and general attention to religion was awakened previous to the commencement of the labours of his great Master. St. Paul himself, addressing the Jews of Antioch, lays an important stress on the preparatory commission of John, as if it had been among the decrees of God, that the sun of righteousness could not arise, till his messenger had testified concerning the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 'God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour Jesus, *when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel*⁸.' Nor was it till John's personal ministry had altogether

⁷ Luke, vii. 16.

⁸ Acts, xiii. 24.

finished, that our Lord's began. 'Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee—*From that time* Jesus began to preach'. So insensibly did the Lord, through whose influence are *the preparations of the heart* in man, make room for his spiritual vine, and cause it to take deep root, and fill the land.

The gradual manner in which the eyes of the world were thus directed to Christ before his actual appearance upon the scene of his ministry, would lead us to suppose that a similar method would be adopted by himself, in the exercise of his functions as a teacher of righteousness, when the fulness of time had arrived for his mission. It will be my object to inquire,

1st. How far our Lord's manner of teaching appears to coincide with this assumption.

In the sixth chapter of the Apostolical Constitutions, after rules have been laid down for

• Matt. iv. 12. 17.

the conduct of a bishop, and it has been shewn that all instruction should be preceded by practice, for the purpose of recommending and adorning doctrine by the force of example, the writer proceeds to strengthen his argument by the following observation. 'For doubtless our Lord and teacher Jesus Christ, the Son of God, began first to do, and then to teach—as Luke says elsewhere (Acts, i. 1), 'The former treatise have I made of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.' For the same reason Christ says himself (Matt. v. 19), 'whosoever shall do and teach' these commandments, 'the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven'.

This passage is an instance of the injudicious manner in which theological writers sometimes connect texts with subjects to which they have little or doubtful application. It would be idle to suppose that any inference can be

¹ Καὶ γὰρ ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν καὶ διδάσκαλος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἤρξατο πρῶτον ποιεῖν, καὶ τότε διδάσκειν· ὡς πάλιν λέγει ὁ Λουκᾶς· Ὡς ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν καὶ διδάσκειν. Διό φησιν· ὅς δ' ἂν ποιῇ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ.—Const. Apost. Lib. ii. Cap. 6.

safely drawn solely from the position of words in one or two sentences of the Bible, and all conclusions built on such a foundation must be worse than unsatisfactory. It is one of the excellencies of the wisdom given from above, that the canonical books of Scripture are free from all faults of this kind; though as soon as we look into the best works of uninspired writers, even of the primitive ages, frequent instances occur of this want of judgement.

But without having recourse to what is so little impressive, that even if allowed, it carries with it scarcely any weight, there are perhaps other considerations which may set the gradual order of our Saviour's teaching in a clearer light. It was not his purpose that the Gospel should be offered at its first promulgation to the Gentiles. Though it was to be '*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*,' yet it was ordained that it was to be '*to the Jew first*.' The Apostles were, therefore, forbidden at their

* Rom. i. 16.

first mission to go amongst any but those of the house of Israel. 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel ³.'

Hence when some Greeks at the last Pass-over came to Philip, desiring him to use his influence, in order to procure them an interview with Jesus, he first consults with Andrew, apparently through a doubt whether it would be proper to bring uncircumcised persons into the presence of their master, after the inhibition he had formerly given them⁴. Jesus then thought proper to declare that the time was approaching when there was to be no difference between the Jew and the Greek, but that the *same Lord was to be rich unto all that call upon him*, and that *all were to be one in Christ Jesus*. And as it would facilitate the future preaching of the apostles among the Gentile part of their ministry, that some preliminary tidings of the light that

³ Matt. x. 5, 6.

⁴ John, xii. 20—22.

had arisen should be carried to those who were then sitting in darkness, it appears probable that the discourse of our Lord which followed, was delivered either as the strangers were approaching, or actually in their presence. This would give them an opportunity of improving the hint of the gracious intention of the redeemer of Abraham's seed in their favour. They would be telling something of the good news of salvation in their own land, and some eyes would perhaps be looking towards the East in patient expectation of him who was to prove not only the 'consolation of Israel,' but of the heathen world.

Our Lord, therefore, seems to have viewed their application to be admitted into his presence, as an earnest of the flowing-in of all the Gentiles to him — 'The hour is come,' said he, 'that the Son of Man should be glorified'—and if his hearers made a suitable use of this doctrine, they may have been instrumental on their return home in disposing the hearts of their countrymen to receive the saving truths which the messengers of

the Gospel would shortly propose to their acceptance. Thus we find in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, that the Greeks are frequently mentioned by name among the heathen converts, as having embraced the proffered mercy of God. Titus was a Greek ; and Timothy himself, one of the most active agents in the promulgation of Christianity, was also a Greek by the father's side ⁵. It is also particularly recorded, that at Iconium and at Thessalonica, there were among the number of the believers '*of the devout Greeks a great multitude*' ⁶.

The case of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman would be likely to have the effect of preparation in a similar manner in another quarter. She would be a living instance that though it was decreed by God that the children should first be filled, yet that the dogs under the table would not only be in their turn admitted to eat the children's crumbs, but to the full enjoyment of that supper which they that were

⁵ Gal. ii. 3. Acts, xvi. 1.

⁶ Acts, xiv. 1. xvii. 4.

bidden had refused to taste'. - Antioch was a city of the country to which this woman belonged; and the news she would carry of her benefactor, might perhaps have been providentially designed to contribute to the subsequent success of Paul and Barnabas in that place.

Nor did Christ disdain to employ missionaries, who were sent before his face to make ready as it were for his own teaching. One whom he had dispossessed of the unclean spirits, had desired leave to accompany him, that he might continue to enjoy the benefit of his instructions. But Jesus had other views in the transaction, and intended to make him useful in procuring for himself and his disciples a favourable reception among those very neighbours to whom the demoniac in his former state had been a terror or a temptation. 'Jesus suffered him not; but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.'

Instead of sending him away with his customary injunction to 'tell no man,' he expressly commissions him to magnify the glory of his cure, and to tell abroad among the heathen the mercies of which he had been a partaker. We read accordingly, that when he began to publish in Decapolis what had befallen him, 'all men did marvel'.⁸ More than a year seems to have elapsed before our Lord went himself into those parts; but his messenger had been so diligent in making him known, that the people were disposed to regard him with greater reverence and expectation; and no sooner had he entered their territory, than they brought unto him another object of compassion, remembering his former miracle, and in hope of witnessing a second display of his power.⁹

In the same manner our Saviour reaped the fruit of John's ministry long after the personal exertions of his forerunner had been suspended by Herod's violence. When our Lord withdrew

⁸ Mark, v. 19, 20.

⁹ Mark, vii. 31.

into the principal scene of John's labours to escape from the malevolence of the Jews¹, the inhabitants of the country, who remembered the Baptist's testimony, and observed, that 'all things that he spake of this man were true, improved the season of his stay among them to such good effect, that 'many believed on him there.' Thus did the seed, though long buried, spring up, and the faithful preacher of repentance, while dead, yet spoke for the honour of his master, and the gathering unto him of such as should be saved.

A circumstance is recorded by St. Matthew, which, at first sight, appears at variance with our Lord's usual readiness to teach, but which perhaps may be explained by considering it in connexion with the present subject.

The Evangelist says, that when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side of the sea of Tiberias². On other occasions, when a more

¹ John, x. 40.

² Matt. viii. 18.

than ordinary desire to hear him was evinced, he continued, without regard to his own fatigue, and preached the word without intermission. Why then did our Lord depart from his custom in this instance, when it might have been imagined he would have availed himself of the numbers who were gathered together to spread the knowledge of his kingdom? The most reasonable way of accounting for this singularity is to suppose, that however promising to human judgement, such an opening might have appeared, there were circumstances which our Lord's acquaintance with the secrets of the heart enabled him to see would render it unfavourable; he had probably taught them as much as they could then receive and digest, or they were indisposed to profit by his further instructions; and thus the benefit they might derive from a more gradual delivery of the truth, would have been lessened or prevented altogether, had he proceeded at that time to lengthen his discourse.

Perhaps too we might have thought it would have been his frequent practice to have joined,

when in the midst of his disciples, in one common and united prayer to his heavenly Father. Yet we find no record of any such custom—no intimation that he thought them yet ripe for bearing part with him in so solemn and intimate a communion with God as such a fellowship in religious worship would have presupposed. On the contrary, it was from the disciples themselves, that the first request to be taught how to address the throne of grace proceeded. ‘Lord,’ said they, ‘teach us to pray.’ And although he had with him only three witnesses of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, yet he three times left them at a little distance while he went away farther, and prayed alone, that if it were possible the cup might pass from him. At another time he constrained his disciples to put to sea without him, ‘and went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone’³.

It was not till he was on the point of leaving the world, that when he uttered his

³ Matt. xiv. 22, 23.

last earthly prayer Christ no longer retired by himself to hold solitary intercourse with the Father. For the first time he then raised his voice to heaven in the presence of his followers, and permitted them to hear him openly making intercession for them. Jesus knew that, as his hour was at hand, it was time that they should partake more largely of the spirit of grace. They were gradually ripening into meet witnesses of his resurrection, and preachers of his kingdom. They were adding day by day to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge for the work of the ministry, and the edification of their fellow-believers in Christ. But the steps by which they rose to this pre-eminence in heavenly wisdom were so progressive as to afford us some insight into the scheme of the divine teacher. Like the man whose sight was gradually restored till his eyes were able to bear the full light of day, so that he who at first saw 'men as trees walking,' was finally enabled to distinguish every man clearly, so was the veil which obscured the understanding of our Lord's companions lifted up by degrees, and their dis-

cernment rendered imperceptibly more spiritual, till at last they became mighty teachers of the mystery of godliness, in all its purity and power.

In the whole of this considerate management—if such a term may be applied without impropriety to that consummate tenderness which bore so patiently with the natural weakness of the disciples—in the condescension with which their low conceptions were elevated, and their indistinct notions cleared—in the measured pace by which all the process of illumination was conducted, and precept was added to precept in proportion as former doctrines had been digested and comprehended, we recognize a familiar feature in the predicted character of the good shepherd, of whom it was foretold that he should carry the lambs in his bosom, and *gently lead* those who were with young.

We see also a specimen of the wonderful excellence of heavenly wisdom. Man is often precipitate in the conduct of his best measures,

and frequently obstructs, by his inexpedient rashness, the success of his projects. But God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. He avails himself of his attribute of omniscience to proportion his revelations to the infirmities of the human mind, and bring out of the storehouse of divine truth 'things new and old' even as each are needful, giving to every man his meat in due season. The babe and the perfect man are both cared for by him, and provision is made for their several wants with as much personality of application as if each individual were the sole object of his providence, and the single recipient of his favour. There is not one whose own particular experience cannot enable him to testify that 'known unto the Lord are *all* his works from the beginning,' and his 'hand is over *all of them*.'

II. I proceed to examine whether the argument acquires any additional force from the subjects themselves of our Lord's discourses,—or in other words, whether there was such a difference between the topics which engaged him

during the first and last years of his ministry, as would indicate an intentional progress from certain elementary truths to the higher mysteries of the Gospel.

Some such gradual developement of heavenly knowledge is probably observable in the course of every pious human minister. As the germ of religious feeling expands within him, it has a corresponding effect upon the tenor of his ministry; and as it is not in the nature of Christianity to be stationary in its acquirements, an enlargement of views, a greater warmth of affections, a more fervent faith, a deeper sense of the guilt and danger of sin, an increased knowledge of the heart of man, obtained by long and patient experience in the school of Christ, all tend to give a gravity and strength to his later efforts in the cause of his master, which could not have been expected at an earlier stage of his labours.

In such a case the change is owing to the progress of a mind under the influence of grace, and we admire the effects of that holy principle

which, like a little leaven, gradually leaveneth the whole lump, and is able to bring to maturity and usefulness what had its origin in a day of small things. But with regard to Christ, there is no reason to suppose that he was filled with a larger measure of the Holy Spirit at the end, than at the commencement of his ministry, or that he was less under the influence of its teaching, when it descended visibly on him from heaven at his baptism, than when he complained in his last hour of the desertion of his Father, and the temporary withdrawing of spiritual support. He and his Father were one *from the beginning*, and from the beginning also he spoke not of himself, but the Father which sent him; he gave him a commandment, what he should say, and what he should speak ⁴.

We may believe, therefore, that it was in conformity with the will of his heavenly Father that the language with which Christ commenced his ministry should be so much more easy to be

⁴ John, xii. 49.

comprehended than that which he held at the close of his course—or, what is the same thing, that so much difference should exist between the sermon on the mount, and the last chapters of St. John.

That the difference imputed does actually exist, it will not be difficult to show.

From the prevailing topic of the discourses of the Baptist, he has obtained the title of the preacher of repentance. Now, it is remarkable, that the doctrine with which our Lord commenced his public teaching, was precisely the same which his forerunner had previously declared—*Repent*—and the constraining argument with which he enforced it was the same—*for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*⁵. This was a simple exhortation well suited to the first dawning of the new dispensation; but afterwards the Apostle expressly calls on the Hebrews to ‘leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go

⁵ Matt. iv. 17.

on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works ⁶. What, therefore, our Lord in his wisdom thought fit for the subject of an elementary discourse, the Apostle, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, judged inexpedient to be made the only topic of discussion among those who had arrived at a more advanced stage in the Christian life.

Again, the principal object of the first recorded public sermon delivered by Christ, was to clear away prejudices and correct errors which prevailed to a great extent among the people, and which would have presented a bar to their reception of him as the true Messiah. Accordingly, he dwells on the nature of his kingdom—on the blessings connected with Christian virtues—on the exposition of the moral law—on the recommendation of particular duties—on the necessity of a practical regard to the divine precepts. These are all elementary subjects

⁶ Heb. vi. 1.

well suited to prepare the mind, and to bring it into a fit state and temper for the announcement of the great mysteries of godliness, and for the revelation of those higher matters into which the very angels who stand around the eternal throne would desire to look. But after the last supper our Lord dwells on subjects of very different import, and which require to be approached with that 'prostration of the understanding,' which, however unwelcome the phrase may sound in the ears of modern infidelity or pride, is the only disposition which can rightly enter into the spirit of Christianity, or adequately comprehend the nature of its doctrines. Of this kind are the views of future happiness displayed for the comfort of the disciples before those dangers began to which the remainder of their lives would be exposed—the assurances of his own gracious, though invisible presence—the promise of the Comforter abiding with them and assisting them—the mystery of God in man, and of man in God, and what was more extraordinary still, the fellowship of the believer with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ.

It was at the same time that our Lord first openly declared that men were henceforth to approach the mercy-seat of God, through him as their great High Priest. He then taught them that the *way into the holiest* would be thrown open, and that they would no longer have to plead before the God of Abraham the promises and covenant which had hitherto been the foundation of their hopes. Henceforth they would have *access by faith* unto him through ‘a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.’ He assured them of this truth, with his usual strong affirmation in things of high importance. ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full⁸.’ These are communications of such sublime and marvellous tendency, that there was a peculiar fitness

⁷ Heb. ii. 17. See Rom. viii. 32—34. Eph. ii. 14—18. Col. iii. 16, 17. Heb. iv. 14—16. vii. 23—25. x. 19—22. xiii. 15, 16. 1 Pet. ii. 4—6. 1 John, ii. 1, 2.

⁸ John, xvi. 23, 24.

in reserving them for the last and most intimate discovery of the divine decrees, when the truth of their promulgator was about to be sealed by the miracle of his resurrection, and he was shortly to ascend visibly before their eyes as their victorious forerunner into the kingdom of his glory.

And yet high and important as these subjects were, and much as they exceeded any former revelation with which the disciples had been favoured, there were still other points connected with the Christian dispensation in which it was necessary for them to be fully instructed, although they were not yet in a state to receive them. There were still remaining prejudices to be subdued, and false conceptions to be removed, before they could hear of certain topics without taking offence, and which it was yet requisite they should know, in order to be duly qualified for the work to which they were called. 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all

truth'. The things alluded to were such, probably, as the abrogation of the ceremonial law—the doctrine of justification by faith—the rejection of the Jews—the calling of the Gentiles—subjects on which we find no explicit declaration till after the full effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost had verified our Saviour's words, that when he was gone away the Father would send the Comforter, who would teach them *all things*¹.

For when our Lord hinted during his lifetime at the abolition of the Mosaic law, he did it obscurely and with reserve. He left it to be gathered as an inference from his prediction concerning the destruction of the temple, or from his declaring to the Samaritan woman, that the hour was coming when the true worshippers should worship the Father neither on Mount Gerizim nor at Jerusalem. Couple this assurance with his saying to his disciples, that wherever two or three should be gathered toge-

¹ John, xvi. 12, 13.

¹ John, xiv. 26.

ther in his name, there would he be in the midst of them ; and it certainly amounts to a virtual repeal of the peculiarities of that system which required that every male should present himself three times annually at a particular place exclusively appropriated for the worship of God.

But how differently does St. Paul declare the same truth. ‘ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.’ ‘ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.’ ‘ Wherefore then serveth the law ? it was added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.’ ‘ Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith was come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.’ ‘ How turn ye

again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labour in vain ².

Here all is plain, and positive, and unreserved; it is expressly affirmed, that the ceremonies of the Mosaic law were superseded, the authority of the new dispensation is distinctly vindicated, and the least semblance of apostasy to Judaism is severely condemned and forbidden.

So too with regard to the great doctrine of justification by faith, the most open declaration made by our Lord on the subject is perhaps that in which he says, that 'the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many ³.' And even this intimation of the purpose for which he was ordained to undergo the death of the cross, un-

² Gal. ii. 15, 16. iii. 13, 19, 24, 25.

³ Matt. xx. 28.

accompanied as it is by any explanation or further comment, was not uttered before the people, but to the disciples apart.

Compare this with the language of the Epistles on the same point, and it will be impossible not to see that the disciple had received his commission to set forth in much clearer terms the meaning of his Lord. 'All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace'.⁴ Nay, the Apostle himself admits, in a passage where he alludes to the very words of Christ before quoted, that for a season this truth was not fully promulgated. 'There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, *to be testified in due time*'.⁵

⁴ Rom. iii. 23, 24. Eph. i. 7.

⁵ 1 Tim. ii. 6. The Vulgate thus expresses it—'Cujus testimonium temporibus suis confirmatum est'—'of which the testimony is in its proper season.'—Macknight's Translation.

On the subject of the rejection of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles, it may be thought that Christ was more explicit. We certainly find the germ of each doctrine contained in his discourses, though it must be allowed that the doctrines themselves are suffered to remain in much comparative obscurity. He prophesied, that while many should come from the east and the west, and should sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, the children of the kingdom should be cast out into outer darkness. He declared to Jerusalem that her house was left unto her desolate. In contradiction to the assertion of the Jews, that they were Abraham's seed, and therefore entitled to the promise made to their federal father, he argues, that whosoever committed sin is the servant of sin, and *the servant abideth not in the house for ever*. And again, in allusion to the admission of the Gentiles within the pale of salvation—'I,' saith he, 'if I be lifted up, will draw *all men* unto me.' If all men, then not the Jews only, but whosoever would accept the terms of mercy, without re-

spect of nations. Thus too at another time, with a still more pointed allusion to the throwing down the barrier which had so long stood between the Gentile world and God—‘Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd’⁶.

Yet so little was this doctrine understood, even by the disciples, that Peter needed a special revelation to remove his prejudices, and convince him that the exclusive favour of God was withdrawn from his nation. Then, and not till then, he breaks out into a thankful and open acknowledgement of his former mistake and present conviction. ‘Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him’⁷. Subsequently to this event the testimony of the Apostles, even on a subject so ungrateful to their countrymen,

⁶ Matt. viii. 11, 12. xxiii. 38. John, viii. 33—39. John, xii. 32.

⁷ Acts, x. 34, 35.

is plain and uncompromising. Figuratively St. Paul shews by the image of an olive tree, that the natural branches were broken off, in order that the plant which was wild by nature might be grafted in*. And without a metaphor he had spoken before to the same effect in the early part of the same epistle. 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good,—to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God.' 'Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children.' 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' And again, St. Paul magnifies the greatness of his 'knowledge in the mystery of Christ, *which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto the*

* Rom. xi. 16—24.

holy Apostles and Prophets by the spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.' The Ephesian converts had been previously reminded, that they who were far off had been made nigh by the blood of Christ—that Christ had made both Jew and Gentile one—had broken down the middle wall of partition between them—had abolished in his flesh the enmity—had reconciled both unto God in one body by the cross⁹. Here every thing is so plain and intelligible, that the most unwilling understanding cannot mistake, and 'the way-faring man, though he be a fool, shall not err therein.'

It appears, then, from the foregoing conclusions, that throughout our Lord's personal intercourse with his disciples, much reserve was maintained on topics which they afterwards understood fully, and that in proportion as by reason of use their senses were exercised to discern

⁹ Rom. ii. 9—11. ix. 7. Gal. iii. 28, 29. Eph. iii. 4—6. ii. 14—16.

both good and evil, larger communications were made to them respecting the divine purposes. 'With many parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to bear it.' 'These things,' said he, 'have I spoken unto you in proverbs; but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father'.¹ It has appeared also, that in process of time, when the minds of men were, in some degree, prepared, that which was spoken in the ear was proclaimed on the housetop, and that knowledge which had been communicated at first by dark sayings, little heeded or understood, was revealed so fully and explicitly, that he who ran might read.

The same reasons which would urge the necessity of gradually discovering the scheme of the new dispensation to the constant attendants on our Lord's ministry, will apply with still greater force to the case of his occasional hearers.

¹ Mark, iv. 33. John, xvi. 25.

Accordingly we find, that whatever reserve he maintained with his disciples, his communications to them were much more free and open than with the people at large. They were not permitted to reveal to others the knowledge which had been imparted to them that 'he was Jesus the Christ².' The parables delivered publicly without comment or application, were often explained in private, and their spiritual meaning pointed out, as in the case of the sower and of the tares. The value of this and similar privileges was urged as a blessing which deserved thankful acknowledgment. Jesus 'turned unto his disciples and said *privately*, 'Blessed are the eyes that see the things that ye see³.' It was a case of frequent occurrence, that after some remarkable exercise of his power of healing diseases, he commanded that the cure should be kept secret, lest a premature disclosure should be made of his possession of an attribute which indicated divine authority. Jesus saith unto the cleansed leper, See thou tell no man. He

² Matt. xvi. 20.

³ Luke, x. 23.

straitly charged the two blind men, saying, 'See that no man know it.' When great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all, he 'charged them that they should not make him known.' Even the display of his glory manifested in the transfiguration, was strictly ordered to be concealed till a specific time had elapsed. 'Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead.'

So too in the Lord's prayer, there was originally no direction given to present all petitions in Christ's name, because it was not yet the proper season for declaring the doctrine of intercession explicitly. Afterwards, when the reason for reserve was removed, and the way into the Holy of Holies through the mediator could be thoroughly understood without endangering, through a premature discovery, the appointed order of events, the proper channel of approach to the throne of grace was promulgated, and a new medium of acceptance of

* Matt. viii. 4. ix. 30. xii. 15, 16. xvii. 9.

powerful and unfailing efficacy was set forth, 'Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full ⁵.'

Our Lord's practice, therefore, as a teacher of divine truth, in a ratio of progressive advancement from the first elements to the highest mysteries of religion, was perfectly consistent with the rule he himself established—*Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.* At the same time it carries with it a beautiful illustration of the saying of the wise man. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day ⁶.'

1. The view which has been now taken of our Saviour's method of teaching, furnishes an answer to a sceptical objection which Deists have often urged against the Bible. They oppose the epistles to the gospels, and because they

⁵ John, xvi. 24.

⁶ Prov. iv. 18.

cannot find in one portion of Scripture the same plain and unreserved exposition of doctrine which is contained in the other, they attempt to throw discredit on the whole page of inspiration, by alledging that serious discrepancies and inconsistencies exist between its several parts. Lord Bolingbroke, for instance, does not hesitate to declare that two Gospels are comprised in the New Testament; and in a still bolder spirit of infidelity another writer maintains that St. Paul has preached a Gospel which directly contradicts that of Christ⁷.

Now, if it be allowed that there is any foundation for that supposed scheme of gradual instruction, which it has been attempted to trace, the force of these objections will be in a great measure removed. As to the assertion, that the system of St. Paul *contradicts* that of Christ, it can only be met with a direct negative, because it is contrary to fact, and to that

⁷ Mr. Chubb. See Dwight's System of Theology, vol. ii.



species of fact which admits of proof. There is much that is supplemental and explanatory in the Epistles of St. Paul ; but not a single expression or sentiment which, to a fair and unprejudiced inquirer, can appear like a contradiction of the doctrine of the Gospels.

But when we consider the nature of these doctrines, many of them so repugnant to the prejudices and opinions of the people amongst whom they were first promulgated, and so difficult to be comprehended, in their spiritual import, by the human mind, disqualified as it is for the discernment of its eternal interest by the prevailing and surrounding engrossments of temporal objects ; we can easily see how, in the slow and progressive developement of a series of truths, that connecting link which runs through and unites the whole should have been neglected and overlooked by those whose predispositions would lead them to be quicksighted in discerning objections, and to welcome, without any very close or accurate scrutiny, the existence of supposed difficulties.

But if it would have been inconsistent with that method which the infinite wisdom of the Founder of the Christian dispensation adopted as the most suitable for its promulgation that such an abrupt and immediate revelation of all its bearings should have taken place, as would have left nothing to be displayed or explained by its subsequent *inspired* preachers;—if the ground of the heart were to be first prepared by the culture of the Great Husbandman for the reception of the seed, which his commissioned and appointed labourers were afterwards to plant and water;—if in the moral, as in the natural world, the order of things were to be the same;—first the blade, then the ear, and finally the full corn in the ear—then, surely, it ought no longer to be a cause of astonishment and doubt, if Paul be more full upon the deep subjects of the Gospel and the great mystery of godliness than Christ; and even if the servant be permitted to *do greater things*, and to enlarge more abundantly than his Master on the marvellous riches of divine love. It would have been clearly improper to have announced the

plan of redemption, otherwise than by types and shadows, before the sacrifice, which expiated the sins of the world, was completed. But when all was finished, and the dying voice of the Saviour of mankind had pronounced that the purpose of his incarnation was fulfilled, then the beauty of the whole design could be measured and comprehended, and the preachers of the Gospel could point specifically to the Lamb of God, who had already paid the price for the ransom of his people.

If then Christ himself be established as the corner stone of the building, it is not derogatory to his dignity, or inconsistent with his glory, that the builders, whom he has appointed and gifted for their office, should raise on that foundation, once laid, a superstructure, framed for manifesting the plan of its heavenly Contriver to the whole world.

2. The subject under consideration suggests to preachers, on the highest authority, the necessity of dividing the word with judgement,

thy, formed under his own inspection for the work of a minister, harmonizes entirely with his own practice. 'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the word of truth ¹.'

So too the Apostle John separates the believers into classes, according to their measure of spiritual knowledge, and gives to each such instruction as may suit their respective stages of advancement. 'I write unto you, *little children*, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake:—I write unto you, *fathers*, because ye have known him that is from the beginning:—I write unto you, *young men*, because ye have overcome the wicked one ².'

Here then, in these examples, the Christian preacher will best seek his model. He will temper his zeal for enlightening the souls committed to his charge, with judgement and circumspection; he will press forward, but gra-

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 15.

² 1 John, ii. 12, 13.

dually and with caution, lest in his haste he place a stumbling block in the way of those who may not be so far from the kingdom of heaven.

At the same time, while we imitate our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, and the great elders of his church in this respect, we must be on our guard, lest timidity, and not prudence, be the cause of our reserve. *The fear of man only bringeth a snare.* At certain seasons it is necessary to speak to men, 'whether they will hear or whether they will forbear,'—'keeping back nothing that is profitable for them,' and declaring to them 'all the counsel of God.' And since it was not our Lord's purpose to develope completely the Christian dispensation, till the sacrifice which sealed and consummated it had been perfected, the duty of communicating to mankind the glad tidings of salvation, in the fulness of its mysteries, devolved in a great measure on the Apostles. It is to them, therefore, or rather to Christ, who was with them always, and who spake by them, that we

must look for the authorized mode of delivering those great truths which it was the business of their lives to promulgate. Their practice, so far as the Holy Spirit has revealed it to us in the short history of their labours which the New Testament contains, fully illustrates the duty of labouring to unite the difficult provinces of a faithful ministry on the one hand, and of an acceptable ministry on the other. Their exhortations teach us to 'commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God'—and their success instructs us that we must 'become all things to all men,' as far as our integrity will permit, that so 'by any means we may save some.' Conciliation, so long as it does not lead us to compromise our principles, is one of the most productive instruments of ministerial usefulness.

3. Again, if Christ be a progressive teacher of truth, we, who profess to study in his school, must take care that our attainments be in like manner progressive. We must choose the church of Thyatira, rather than that of Ephesus, for

our pattern. Our last works must be more than our first, instead of such as will expose us to the charge of having left our first love³. *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement. And this will we do, if God permit*⁴.

Such however is the nature of man, that no part of a minister's duty will more require the exercise of a sound discretion than the superintendence of the individual progress of his congregation. In his private intercourse with the several members of his flock he will experience no difficulty in proportioning the subject of his advice to their respective cases; but his judgement will be often subjected to a severe trial in the choice of topics for his public ministration, where hearers of different capacity and growth

³ Rev. ii. 4, 19.

⁴ Heb. v. 1—3.

in grace are assembled together. Expressions which may be suitable for one state of mind will be often very dangerous for another ; in awakening the thoughtless, or rousing the profligate to a sense of their guilt, the bruised reed may be broken, or the smoking flax quenched ; the impenitent may take to themselves the promises of mercy intended for repentant sinners, while the poor in spirit, and they that mourn, may be discouraged by unseasonable denunciations of the vengeance of God proclaimed against all unrighteousness.

In this respect, again, God's gradual revelation of himself to his church, will prove the safest example. Care must be taken not to overfill the vessels ; but, at the same time, the sloth or inattention of some of the members must not become a hindrance to the progress of the whole body, and none must be left without that portion of meat in due season, which is needful for the support of their spiritual life.

Above all, the dispensers of the Gospel will always remember the duty of prayer for the im-

provement of those who are committed to their charge. Christ prayed much for his disciples; and the chief subject of St. Paul's prayers for the churches was the same as that of St. Peter for his brethren; that they should *grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.

4. There is, lastly, another point of view in which our Lord's treatment of those whom he was gradually instructing in the mysteries of his dispensation deserves consideration.

Christ never seemed to despise the smallest ray of light which had dawned on the spiritual discernment of his followers. He warmed and enlivened the faint affections by dwelling on the love of the Father, but he never quenched the glimmering spark of feeling which, however weak in its commencement, yet gave promise of becoming finally, under due management, the kindling source of a 'great fire.' No word ever

2 Pet. iii. 18. See also Eph. i. 16—19. iii. 14—19. Col. ii. 1, 2.

dropped from his lips which could have a tendency to repress the progress of a heart awakening to a consciousness of sin, or which could appear to disparage that measure of light and grace, however defective, to which a prejudiced or worldly-minded hearer had attained with difficulty. Though he lamented that they who had riches should hardly enter into the kingdom of God, yet when the ruler of the synagogue, or the nobleman of Capernaum, professed a readiness to believe in his power, or when rich Zaccheus manifested a desire to see him, he did not reject their overtures because they proceeded from individuals of a class from among whom, at least in the infancy of a despised religion, not many should be saved, but dealt with them in his mercy according to the measure of their faith. When Nicodemus came to him by night, he did not repulse him from his presence as an unfit disciple, because his new convert had not dared to confess openly his belief in the Messiah before the council of which he was a member. The same conciliatory tone marked our Lord's answer to the Scribe whom he pronounced to be *not far from the kingdom of God*, although the

conversation which ended with so mild and encouraging an assurance appears to have commenced in an attempt to entrap our Saviour by putting to him an insidious question.

- All these instances seem to shew, that however small may be the seed of divine truth which has been yet sown in the heart, Christ would have it invigorated and fostered; that he does not desire that the plant which in a more kindly soil has flourished luxuriantly, and brought forth fruit an hundred fold, should be hastily undervalued or rooted out, because in another situation its growth has been more tardy, and its produce less abundant.

Those persons then are wrong who treat with contempt or pass an indiscriminate censure upon all who do not come up to their own criterion of character. They are uncharitable in condemning them, whom it does not yet appear that God has condemned, and they are presumptuous in daring to limit that mercy of

which they profess to have been themselves the unworthy recipients.

And yet the line of demarcation is sometimes so strictly drawn, that it would seem as if no attainments which fell short of a prescribed standard were to be accounted as indicative of the existence of any religious feeling. Some think all preachers unedifying who have not a certain mode of address, or a certain view of the duties of their ministry. Some give up as lost those who, if fed for a time with the milk of the word, might be led eventually to desire the strong meat of the Gospel. Some blame all condescension to the weakness of a Christian brother, who, under a more judicious treatment, might finally be rendered a signal monument of the mighty working of the Holy Spirit.

It would be more consonant to our Lord's example, if when appearances on the whole are favourable, those who are yet lacking one thing were to be brought to a clearer knowledge of the way of salvation by forbearance and season-

able admonition, instead of being arbitrarily rejected by the sentence of human opinion from any participation in the fellowship of Christian hopes and privileges. It becomes us to act to our brethren as wives are instructed to behave to their husbands, that 'if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by our conversation, coupled with fear⁶.' If the Apostle thought it necessary to exhort believers⁷ to *add* to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity, he must have contemplated the possibility that those who might afterwards become *thoroughly furnished unto all good works*, had been formerly deficient in some of the Christian graces.

In a word, the whole experience of the nature of the human heart ought to teach us to be moderate and humble in forming our judgments

⁶ 1 Pet. iii. 2.

⁷ 2 Pet. i. 5.

of others—to hope even against hope—and in cases where even charity herself is constrained to admit that appearances are unfavourable, to remember that with God all things are possible, and that he sometimes changes the heart in a manner and at a time the least expected. Nothing is farther removed from the true principle of Christian love, than that Pharisaical spirit which includes in one sweeping sentence of condemnation all whose opinions, even in matters not essential, vary from our own; or all who from a different habit of feeling, or any other cause purely constitutional, display in a less lively and ostentatious manner the strength of their religious affections.

CHAPTER VI.

Christ's adaptation of incidental Occurrences or Expressions to the Purposes of Instruction.

WHEN St. James wished to deter the Jews from too indiscriminately desiring the distinction of teachers in the Christian church, he dwells particularly on the difficulty of ordering their conversation in such a manner as to reflect no dishonour on so sacred a profession. On their circumspection in the government of the tongue, not only the credit of their office, but the success of their ministerial labours, would greatly depend. And even among the best of men, there was an inconsistency in this respect frequently to be deplored; for the gift of speech became so often an occasion of stumbling, that a Christian might be considered perfect in proportion as he was able to subdue the unruliness of the tongue. ‘ If any man offend not in word,

the same is a perfect man Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing¹.'

With a similar conviction of the difficulty of exercising this branch of practical religion, St. Paul gives a special rule on the subject, to the intent that the language of believers in all the circumstances and relations of life should not only be inoffensive, but of an edifying tendency—'Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man².' And the Psalmist has made it the distinctive character of the righteous man, that 'his mouth speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgement³.'

The difficulty of obeying the apostolical injunction in this respect must have been felt by all who have ever accustomed themselves to review their conduct with honest self-examination. They must be conscious of failing often against charity which speaketh no ill of its neighbour—

¹ James, iii. 2, 8—10.

² Col. iv. 6.

³ Ps. xxxvii. 30.

of having often grieved the good by saying what ought not to have been said, or of having encouraged the wicked by omitting to say what ought to have been said—of many an idle word or inconsistent discourse which has gone forth past recal, and has been recorded for judgement against the utterer at the day of general account.

But chiefly must those whose official duty it is to be telling of the Lord's works in the great congregation, have experienced the necessity of praying that grace may be multiplied to them in proportion to their increased need, and of setting always a watch upon themselves, lest, like Moses, they speak unadvisedly with their lips, and bring disrepute and suspicion upon the cause they have undertaken. One light expression inadvertently suffered to escape them, or one opportunity of recommending religion neglected or unimproved, will press heavily on the recollection of those who have a strong sense of the extensive harm which thoughtlessness in these respects often produces. *We are verily*

guilty concerning our brother in a moral sense, as often as we tempt him by a want of proper seriousness in our own deportment, or forego availing ourselves of the advantage of a seasonable observation whenever it may be introduced with propriety.

Now it was foretold of Christ, that 'grace should be poured into his lips,'—and that the Lord God had 'given him the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that was weary⁴.' It would be unnecessary to shew how satisfactorily these predictions were fulfilled in our Lord. Even the men of Nazareth, prejudiced as they were by local associations, and perplexed by the meanness of his supposed origin, 'all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth⁵.' My object is rather to direct attention to one very remarkable feature of that wisdom which Christ displayed in his ministry;—the manner in which

⁴ Ps. xlv. 2. Is. l. 4.

⁵ Luke, iv. 22.

he adapted incidental occurrences or expressions to the purpose of instruction. The consideration of this subject will perhaps afford some hints for the better discharge of that difficult duty to which allusion has been made.

One of the things occurring to a reader who perused the life of our Saviour for the first time, and who brought to it a mind alive to original impressions, would probably be the wisdom with which every incident in it was directed to the promotion of one common end. There is an unity of design pervading the whole, never interrupted by inconsistencies or digressions which might have the effect of diverting the mind from the prominent subject of attention, or of diminishing the influence arising from the general tenor of his more serious discourses. It would seem as if every word and action were studied with a view of affording a kind of prophetic fulfilment of the apostolic rule—‘Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God’⁶.

⁶ 1 Cor. x. 31.

At the same time it is amongst the wonders of our Lord's ministry, that there is nothing forced in the transitions which are perpetually made from external circumstances to doctrinal or moral points. A casual expression, an incidental occurrence, the season of the year, a particular place, the vicinity of a building, or the imagery of the surrounding country, often served to introduce and illustrate matters of gravest import and replete with serious instruction.

This peculiarity has been remarked by writers on the life of Christ. Bishop Law, and Newcome have both given examples of it. Warburton alludes to it in the following passage: 'The properest season we can conceive for the institution of the last supper, was the instant of time between the celebration of the type, and the offering of the antitype. This time likewise corresponded with Christ's usual practice, who was wont to deliver his instructions by actions and expressions bearing allusion to what passed before his eyes, or presented

itself in the natural course of things to his observation? Jortin says—‘whosoever examines the discourses of our Lord with attention, may find in them a certain character and way of speaking peculiar to him. His manner, by which he may be distinguished, consists in raising matter of instruction and moral reflection from the things which were at hand, which presented themselves to him and to his audience. Hence it is that his sermons to the people and his conversations with his disciples allude perpetually to the time of year, or to the place where he was, or to the objects surrounding him, or to the occupation and circumstances of those to whom he addressed himself, or to the state of public affairs⁷.’

There seems to be some connexion between this adoption of occasional illustrations *pro re nata*, and the use of parables; and both modes of teaching were probably suggested to our

⁷ Div. Leg. vol. vi. p. 173.

⁸ Jortin’s Discourses concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion, pp. 199, 200.

Lord by the same cause, the fondness of the oriental nations for figurative language. In selecting a few examples of the practice from the different Gospels, I shall first bring forward some which have reference to natural objects.

I. Much of our Lord's time, from the character of his occupation, was passed in the temple. Its beauty and magnificence were favourite subjects of remark among the Jews, and they frequently challenged admiration for the size and splendour of its buildings, as the boast of their city and the memorial of their national religion. It might be expected therefore that our Saviour would avail himself of so popular a topic to present, through a palatable medium, truths which could not but be unacceptable to many of his hearers. Allusions to it consequently are very frequent, and it was to one of these that the false witnesses suborned against him were indebted for the only subject even of false accusation which they could bring. For it was after he had purged the temple from the abuses with which it had been defiled, that he

foretold to the Jews the rebuilding of the spiritual temple of his body which they would destroy.

It was also in the temple that Christ quoted the passage from the Psalmist, in which it was predicted that the stone that the builders refused would become the head of the corner, and the allusion was probably suggested by the sight of the object from which the metaphor was derived. Sheep were kept in one of the outer courts to supply the demand required for sacrifices⁹; and Jesus, taking notice of this

⁹ 'Near this gate were several pens or folds, containing sheep and lambs to be sold for sacrifice; so that our Lord probably pointed to these, when he delivered in the temple that beautiful discourse, concerning himself as the good shepherd, and his people as the sheep. Perhaps the porter, in that discourse, may allude to the porter of the gate, without whose permission none obtained admittance; and the conduct of a shepherd in going before his flock, might have been suggested either from memory, or from the observance of a flock coming to the pens, and following their keeper at that instant through the gate of the temple. For this is the eastern mode of conducting sheep, and it was our Saviour's custom to catch at circumstances, and render them the vehicle of religious instruction.' Brown's Antiquities of the Jews, Vol. i. p. 61.

circumstance, compares himself to the shepherd and his people to the flock in the beautiful parable contained in the tenth chapter of St. John. Beausobre mentions a peculiarity connected with the same inclosure, which appears to be alluded to in another passage. 'It was unlawful for any one to come in here with a *stick* or a *purse* in his hand, with *shoes* on, or *dusty feet* Which circumstances may give some light to Matthew, x. 9, 10, where Jesus Christ orders his disciples to walk in the discharge of their ministry with the same circumspection and care as men were wont to take when they designed to walk in the temple¹.'

Again; after an impressive denunciation which our Saviour had uttered against the hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees, the disciples, as they were leaving the temple, called his attention to the stupendous works of that structure, perhaps with some reference to that part of his preceding discourse in which he had

¹ Introd. to the New Test. p. 62.

exposed the blindness of those teachers who disallowed the obligation of oaths sworn by the temple itself or the altar, while they strictly enforced the binding nature of engagements made by the gold of the temple or the offerings. But Christ was not to be diverted from his spiritual views by prospects of earthly splendour, and he takes occasion to deliver a prophecy which the sight around them, though it would be little calculated to make them expect its completion, would render an impressive lesson of the instability of human grandeur. *See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.*

After retiring from the city he sat with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, which St. Mark mentions was ‘over against the temple’; and there, with a full view before him of the whole of that costly edifice which was the wonder of all mankind, our Lord proceeded

^a Mark, xiii. 3.

to detail more circumstantially the events of its approaching destruction, and the signs which should be a token to believers that the predicted dispensation was near at hand. Now the point on which I would dwell here, is the vicinity of the objects themselves respecting which these disclosures were made. Never could his hearers have revisited the place where these things were uttered, or have turned their eyes towards the structure over which desolation was impending, without calling to mind the description of the last judgement, which was figuratively interwoven into the same discourse, or without reflecting on the sentences which would then finally be passed on all classes of people. Their master's words would be indelibly fixed upon their remembrance by a sort of local association ; and the recurring view of the things they had once seen as well as heard would revive with peculiar freshness the memory of the solemn lesson to which the casual vicinity of the temple had originally given occasion.

A knowledge of Jewish rites explains the propriety of a figure used by our Lord at another time, in which the same readiness of allusion to passing events is beautifully marked.

On the last day of the feast of tabernacles it was customary to offer up water drawn from the fountain of Siloam as a special invocation of the blessing of him that giveth the former and the latter rain on the fruits of Judea. Now it was in reference to this annual ceremony that 'on the last day, that great day of the feast,' as St. Luke particularly notes the exact time when this occurrence took place, our Lord stood and invited the people to draw from him, as from a living fountain, the principle of spiritual life. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink . . . But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.* And this metaphorical language would be the more intelligible to them, as the effusion of the Holy Spirit had been foretold by their own prophets under this very figure of living water. 'I will pour water upon him that is

thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my spirit on thy seed³.

Similar language occurs frequently throughout the Jewish Scripture, and we find it imitated by St. Paul and St. John⁴; but it is worthy of notice, that the only other passage in which Christ employs the same figure is remarkable for a similar appropriateness of reference to the circumstances of the moment. When he met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, in order to draw her attention to the truths concerning the influence of the Holy Spirit, which he was about to unfold under the image of living water, he introduced his discourse by saying to her, 'Give me to drink.' In the conference that followed, he enlarges under the same apposite metaphor on the satisfying and purifying nature of the fountain of grace. 'Whosoever drinketh the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of

³ Is. xlv. 3.

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 4. Rev. vii. 17; xxi. 6, &c.

water springing up unto everlasting life.' He might have explained to the woman in other words and without a figure, that if any one would turn from the exhausted or polluted sources of worldly wisdom or earthly happiness, and become athirst for the living God, he should be refreshed with an inexhaustible supply of the Holy Spirit, springing up in heavenly affections, and purifying the soul from the vitiating properties of sin. But considering her situation, and the errand on which she came to the well, no language however plain would have been so intelligible as that which was actually used, no expedient however plausible would have impressed the doctrine of grace so indelibly upon her imagination.

On the very day after the allusion to the water which has been just noticed, Jesus was discoursing in the treasury with some Jews who believed, when he enlarged on the glorious liberty and freedom from spiritual bondage which it was the privilege of his disciples to enjoy. According to Sir Isaac Newton's calcu-

lation, this took place on a sabbatical year; and if, as he supposes, it was the custom to release the Hebrew servants from slavery on that year; as well as on the year of jubilee, it gives a new and very apposite signification to the language used. 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. The servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed ⁵.'

The comparison of the Pharisees to a 'whited sepulchre' was another allusion to an object daily before the eyes of every dweller in Jerusalem, but would be scarcely intelligible to one not conversant with Jewish customs. Whoever came in contact with a sepulchre contracted ceremonial pollution; and to avoid the frequent occurrence of such a circumstance among strangers who came to the feasts, and others not well acquainted with the localities of the place, it was ordered that on a particular day of the year all the sepulchres should be

⁵ John, viii. 32—36.

painted white with a mixture of chalk and water, that they might be so conspicuous as to be easily avoided ⁶. Each of these would be a striking and visible memorial of our Lord's allusion, and would expose by a familiar emblem the inward hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, however varnished over by a show of external righteousness.

Other examples are not wanting of the manner in which our Lord daily borrowed illustrations for the subjects of his discourse from the scenes of nature which incidentally fell under his notice. When mention was made of the manna provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, he represented himself as the true bread from heaven. When one of his disciples de-

⁶ A decimo quinto mensis Adar investigarunt, atque ubicunque sepulchrum invenerunt, cujus abluta ab imbris esset dealbatio, eam restaurarunt, ut locus immundus dignosceretur, atque ut inde declinarent sacerdotes comesturi Trumam. Glossa ad Shekalim et rursus ad Maasar Shen. Sepulchra calce notarunt ad formam ossium, quam aqua infusam circa sepulchrum fuderunt, ut dignoscerent inde omnes locum istum immundum esse, ideoque ab eo esse declinandum. Lightfoot, Horæ Heb. ad Matt. xxiii. 27.

clared he knew not the place his master was preparing for them, or the way he was going, he answered by proposing himself as the way the truth and the life. As he was passing through a vineyard he set forth the necessity of mutual love between himself and the members of his church under the parable of the intimate union between the vine and its branches. Or if it be supposed, that the contents of the fifteenth and two following chapters of St. John were spoken at table before he left the house to retire to Gethsemane, the metaphor would have been suggested by the fruit of the vine of which he had just been partaking at the paschal supper with his disciples. The bringing of little children to him, and the eagerness with which the Pharisees chose out the chief rooms at feasts, furnish opportunities of inculcating humility,—the sight of the flowers of the field and the fowls of the air suggest a lesson respecting the superintending hand of Providence,—an invitation to eat bread is improved into a recommendation of the duty of disinterestedness,—the punishment of the insurgent Ga-

lilæans and the fall of the tower in Siloam give occasion to a general warning, that impenitent sinners, of whatever party or nation, would finally perish with a similar destruction⁷.

Thus whether abroad or at home a vehicle for instruction was always at hand. The return of the seasons of corn or fruit reminded him of the fields white already for the spiritual harvest, and of the criterion by which the true nature of principles might be ascertained — ‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’ The accidental circumstance of the disciples forgetting to take bread with them in one of their journeyings, introduced a warning to ‘beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ And as he was at table in the house of a Pharisee, when one who sat at meat with him remarked, probably without any spiritual ideas of a future state, on the blessedness of those who should eat bread in the kingdom of heaven, our Lord seizes the moment to deliver a parable signifying the plentiful provision made

⁷ John, vi. 32. xiv. 3—6. xv. 1. Luke, xiv. 12—14. xiii. 1—5.

Messiah, or in a more extended sense in allusion to Christ's final descent from his mediatorial throne to execute justice on the wicked. The propriety of the moral, therefore, is independent of any temporary interest ; but to those who were familiar with the recent circumstances which suggested what may be called the story of the parable, it would be invested with a peculiar beauty from their coincidence with historical events which would naturally form a prominent subject of conversation among them in consequence of their jealousy of the Roman yoke.

II. In the passages hitherto considered, the figurative language of Christ seems to have been principally derived from the natural objects which incidentally presented themselves to his view, and whether we examine its effect in rendering the spirit of his doctrines more intelligible to the comprehension of his followers, or in imprinting them more permanently on their memories by the local associations which would be created, the wisdom of the selection cannot be questioned. Some passages shall now be ad-

duced, the context of which will show that our Lord was equally solicitous to address himself with allusion to the peculiar character or circumstances of his hearers.

An early instance of this judicious practice occurs in the case of Nicodemus. This ruler of the Jews had come to Jesus privately under cover of the night; and though our Lord would not reprove severely this sign of weakness in his new convert, yet in the conversation which ensued, he glances at his timidity, and reminds him that the preferring of darkness to light is the ground of the condemnation of infidels. ‘For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprovèd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God².’

In the same manner, with reference to the miracle which he had previously wrought on the

² John, iii. 20, 21.

man who was born blind, he illustrates the design of his mission by a metaphor derived from the subject. As by his efficacious touch the faculty of seeing was restored to the blind eyes, so were the spiritually blind to be delivered by faith in his doctrine from their benighted condition, and enabled to discern the true light which had at length shined in darkness. The same figure further served to condemn the wilful blindness of the Pharisees, whose eyes should be judicially closed as a punishment for their obduracy. 'For judgement I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind³.'

The affectionate reproof conveyed to Martha in that significant sentence—'one thing is needful'—also carried with it a seasonable allusion to the inexpediency of her being cumbered with much serving, while it recommended the adoption of the same good part which her sister had already chosen⁴. Afterwards, when our Lord

³ John, ix. 39

⁴ Luke, x. 41, 42.

met her at Bethany on the occasion of the death of her brother, he turns that event to profit, by leading her mind from reflecting on the temporary decease and resuscitation of Lazarus, to comprehend the mystery of his own character as the resurrection and the life. 'Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die^s.' Our Lord then appeals to her with a direct inquiry, in a manner unusual with him—'Believest thou this?'—and the explicit confession of faith which followed shewed the immediate conviction which had attended his seasonable exposition of so difficult a doctrine. It is further remarkable, that in the very next verse, the strongest instance occurs which the Gospels furnish of the term *teacher*, applied as a title of Christ. 'When she had so said, she went her way and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, the master

^s John, xi. 25, 26.

(rather, the teacher, ὁ διδάσκαλος⁶) is come, and calleth for thee.'

Nor are many other instances wanting in which, when a peculiarly important or difficult doctrine was to be uttered, our Lord seems to have chosen to familiarize it to the understanding by some illustration arising from temporary circumstances.

It is not easy to conceive how that intimate union can exist between Christ and his people, which results from the love entertained by the Redeemer for those whom he has ransomed from the power of Satan. He took an opportunity, therefore, of comparing it with the strength of natural relationship; and when one said unto him, that his mother and his brethren stood near desiring to speak with him, he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples and said, 'Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever

⁶ Christus a Deo missus ut homines doceret veram religionem διδάσκαλος vocatur κατ' ἐξοχὴν. John, xi. 28. Schleusner in voce διδάσκαλος.

shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my father and sister and mother?' He thus practically revealed in a way which would be understood by all, that whatever there was of instinctive attachment in the nearest connexions of social life, all was to be concentrated in the person of Christ, and transferred in idea as the fittest measure of his regard for the weakest and humblest of his sincere disciples.

In Ezekiel's vision of the holy waters springing from under the threshold of the temple, and communicating life even to the water of the dead sea, a representation had been afforded, under the image of a great multitude of fishes, for which the fishers should spread forth their nets, of the future efficacy of the Gospel to quicken and enliven the darkest hearts, and to render the most unlikely portions of the earth productive of a spiritual harvest⁷. But this figurative prophecy has nothing of peculiar fit-

⁷ Matt. xii. 46—50. Compare also Luke, xi. 27, 28.

⁸ Ezek. xlvii. 6—10.

ness connected with the context to recommend it, beyond the propriety with which the language of the emblem serves to describe the object intended. On the contrary, when our Lord borrows the same metaphor, for his call to Peter and Andrew, and summons them to follow him that he might make them fishers of men, nothing can be more appropriate than such a mode of address to men who were at that very time casting their nets into the sea in the prosecution of their ordinary employment⁹.

With a similar propriety, after the conversion of Zaccheus the publican, and in his presence, he delivered the parable of the pounds, where under the figure of the improvement of money lent for commercial purposes at a fair rate of interest, the proper use is inculcated of the several natural gifts entrusted to men.

On another occasion, when a Pharisee who had invited him to dinner marvelled at his not

⁹ Matt. iv. 18, 19.

complying with the customs of the Jews respecting the previous washings which their traditions required, he digressed from the mention of external ordinances to the necessity of inward purity, and exposed the hypocrisy which made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, while the inward part was full of deceit and wickedness¹.

Thus with a consummate wisdom, which, though it were vain to expect to find it in the same degree in any other teacher, all teachers are bound to examine and imitate, Christ accommodated the circumstances of his hearers to the furtherance of the grand objects of his ministry, and, at least in one sense of the words, *'became all things to all men.'* And as God called the Magi with a star because they were skilled in the observation of the heavens, and such a phenomenon would be suitable to excite their attention to the purpose of its appearance, so did his beloved Son borrow from above the

¹ Luke, xix. xi. 37—39.

same superhuman intelligence, and avail himself of the accidents of each particular character to approach the heart and captivate the understanding of every description of hearer.

III. It may be further observed, in connexion with this subject, that the expressions of our Lord were not only often borrowed from the objects or persons around him, but his actions were at times purposely designed to attract attention to some doctrine which was to be established on them.

The symbolical actions of the prophets will immediately occur, as having been founded on a similar principle. Joash taking his bow and arrows—Jeremiah hiding the linen girdle, or breaking the potter's vessel, or putting on bonds and yokes—Ezekiel carrying out his household stuff, or reclining on his left side for three hundred and ninety days, with a representation of Jerusalem before him, were all impressive signs intended to call the observation of the Israelites in a lively manner to the hidden meaning which

they concealed¹. A visible circumstance transacted before their eyes might sometimes serve to convey a profitable hint more forcibly than even line upon line and precept upon precept, to a people who had often remained unteachable, under the most solemn delivery of the word of God.

Of the same character was the transaction recorded by St. John, when Jesus condescended to wash the feet of his disciples before he partook with them of the feast of the passover. Though partly explained by our Lord immediately, so far as the thing signified consisted in the lesson of humility which the outward action was intended to convey, yet the more mysterious part of Christ's meaning was to be known hereafter. Believers would understand in future times, though not when the fact occurred, that it was principally intended as an emblem of the justifying blood of the Redeemer, and of the sanctifying power of the Spirit; and that, so far

¹ 2 Kings, xiii. 15—19. Jer. xiii. 1—11. xviii. 2—6. xix. 1—12. xxvii. 2—8. Ezek. xii. 2—7. iv. 4, 5.

from having been designed as a literal injunction of a religious ordinance, its chief object was to represent how 'Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word.' 'If I wash thee not,' said he to Peter, excusing himself, 'thou hast no part in me.'

An example of another emblem used for a similar purpose is recorded by three of the Evangelists, and they all concur in reporting the sort of dramatic scene which took place on the occasion. The disciples had contended amongst themselves privately, who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and at last came to our Lord to decide the question. In order to impress on their minds more strongly the value of humility, and the necessity of their renouncing all views of an ambitious nature, he called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall

humble himself *as this little child*, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive *one such little child* in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend *one of these little ones* which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea ³.

So too the transfiguration may be considered in the light of a representation vouchsafed for the sake of describing the future glory of our Lord in a manner intelligible to mortal understandings. When we read of his face shining as the sun, and of his raiment being white as the light, it conveys to the mind a notion of some most pure and ineffable brightness in which all his perfections were revealed; and all the heavenly excellencies of his character were unfolded and displayed without reserve. It tended to realize to the apprehensions of the beholder some faint image of the invisible world, and

³ Matt. xviii. 1—6. Mark, ix. 33—37. Luke, ix. 46—48.

painted to their imaginations the sun of righteousness, the light of the world, not as he appeared on the scene of his humiliation and sufferings, not in the likeness of sinful flesh and under the form of a servant, not without form or comeliness and with a visage marred more than any man, but with the fashion of his countenance altered, freed from those clouds which commonly obscured the brightness of his lustre, and which shrouded the majesty belonging to him of right as the only begotten of the Father; It discovered to them a glimpse of the state that he had voluntarily relinquished,—of the glory which was again in store for him when he should have finished his work,—and of that gracious transformation which should finally be wrought in themselves, when this mortal should put on immortality, when, in virtue of his right as Saviour, he should ‘change their vile body that it might be fashioned like unto his glorious body’.

Again, when our Lord saw fit, previously to working some of his miracles, to spit on the eyes of the blind man, and put his hands on them—Mark, viii. 23,—or to make clay of his spittle and anoint the eyes with it—John, ix. 6,—or to put his fingers into the deaf ears or touch the dumb tongue—Mark, vii. 33,—it cannot be supposed that these outward actions, some of which would seem to have a tendency rather to defeat than forward the object proposed, were intended to have any other effect than that of attracting attention to the cure about to be performed, or to signify by the use of the emblem, that the most unlikely means, under his blessing, might be productive of much good.

In the same way, when he breathed on his disciples after the resurrection⁵, the action did not imply that he actually imparted the Holy Ghost in that manner, or by that channel, for in point of fact the effusion did not really take

⁵ John, xx. 22.

place till the day of Pentecost; but it served as an earnest of the future blessing, and was expressive of the sacred breath or spirit, intended at once to prepare them for its reception, and to show them that it would be derived from his power, and communicated from his fulness.

So too when he suffered the devils to enter into the swine and run violently down a steep place into the sea, and perish in the waters, it was to illustrate, by a visible example, the fatal rage and strength of Satan, and the final destruction of those who listen to his temptations⁶.

The cursing of the barren fig-tree was designed to convey an important lesson in a similar manner. At the time the sentence was pronounced—'No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever'—though our Lord did not call in any particular way the attention of his followers either to the words themselves, or to their im-

⁶ Matt. viii. 32.

port, the Evangelist expressly notices, that '*the disciples heard it.*' The day after, as they were passing by the same place, undoubtedly owing to the secret leading of Christ, 'they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, *calling to remembrance*, saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away.' The purpose of the miracle was then answered, the significant action had prepared their minds for the instruction to be founded on it, and our Lord immediately added as the moral of the transaction, 'Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in faith, believing, ye shall receive.'

If it were necessary to illustrate this part of the subject farther, the appointment of an out-

⁷ Mark, xi. 13—22. Matt. xxi. 21, 22.

ward visible sign in baptism might be quoted as designed to be emblematic of the inward spiritual grace; or the partaking of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, as the symbols of the actual body and blood of Christ, who is thus typically represented as bruised for our iniquities, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins. Thus the insignificance of the external ceremony becomes sanctified as it were by the spiritual application; and through the medium of visible things, the things invisible and hard to be understood, are rendered more obvious to human capacities.

We arrive, then, at this conclusion—that whether by adapting his language to the circumstances of place or person, or by suiting his actions to the delivery of some important truth, nothing was omitted by our Lord to conciliate the prejudices of the ill-disposed, or to enlighten the darkness of error. There are divers languages for addressing the heart, as well as for speaking intelligibly to the ear; and if the mixed multitude which marvelled at the effects

of the descent of the Holy Spirit, heard the apostles telling in the tongue of each the wonderful works of God, the attendants on our Lord's ministry heard him too speak to each as it were in his own language, and accommodate his discourse by turns to the peculiar necessities of all, however various the occasions which presented themselves, or however different the characters which composed his auditory.

The particular feature of our Lord's ministerial character which has been contemplated in the preceding pages, is replete with useful instruction.

1. It teaches that it is a duty incumbent on the clergy to render all things subservient to the object of their ministry. They have a double account to settle—an account with God, as well as an account with man; and it may happen that though the latter party have nothing to object against them, yet their functions may not have been adequately discharged in the sight of the great High Priest of the church.

It is very possible that the legitimate demands of man may be satisfied, while little progress has been made in the liquidation of the debt due to an higher power. Like Job, men may be clear at the tribunal of their fellow-creatures, but may have nothing to answer when God riseth up in judgement. Even if their engagements be not exactly in the nature of a conditional contract, as far as man is concerned, yet there are certain extra-official obligations, certain undefined, though not the less binding duties, which every man 'set apart' for the ministry has undertaken to fulfil. His work must not be looked upon as an ordinary profession, to be conducted on that principle of reciprocity which governs the common dealings of mankind. He desecrates his high calling when he considers it in the light of a mere commercial transaction, in which a bargain is struck for a certain return of services upon the payment of a certain price. Like his heavenly pattern he will constantly be about his master's business; he will avail himself of times and seasons and topics, and present the truths of which he is the

depository in so judicious and pertinent a manner, that his speech may be at all times seasoned with salt, and that no man may be able to accuse him of neglect, or inquire, like Esau, in the tone of mingled regret and reproach—
Hast thou not a blessing for me also?

Much discretion is necessary for the due acquittal of the conscience in this respect, and therefore there must be much study of the divine model, and much earnest prayer for assistance from above that ‘the priest’s lips may keep knowledge,’ and speak seasonably as well as affectionately or boldly, as the occasion may require. If he be a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, he will be like ‘an householder which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.’ He will conform himself to the capacities and identify himself with the feelings of each; he will not speak of the first elements of Christianity to those whose foundation is already laid and their faith settled, neither will he talk of the multiplied effusions of divine grace to those who have not so much

as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. He will not cast his pearls before swine without discrimination or reserve, but he will not shrink in any company or at any time from avowing the principles on which he acts, and giving a reason for the hope that is in him. In a word, he will hold himself ready and furnished richly in all knowledge for every demand upon his good offices—he will comfort the broken-hearted—he will humble the proud—he will awaken the careless—he will guide the inquirer—he will recal the wandering—he will conciliate the prejudiced—above all, by the general tendency of his conversation he will endeavour to impart a salutary tincture to the society in which he mixes, and even in his daily intercourse with the world, ‘will minister’ in some sort ‘unto godly edifying.’ Considering our Lord’s example, and studying daily in his school of teaching, he will hear that solemn declaration as if it were addressed with a special application to his own order and profession—‘*I say unto you, that every idle word*

that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement !'

2. We may learn also, as a general inference, the importance of making religion the subject of conversation.

Waving the discussion of the arguments so often urged against its introduction,—the danger of profaning grave and solemn questions in miscellaneous society, or the altercation and personal heat which might be likely to arise from such a practice,—it is only intended to assert, that where no such objections can with justice be alleged,—in family circles for instance,—there is often a very unchristian desertion of religious topics, altogether inconsistent with the profession of those who read and believe, that *whosoever shall be ashamed of the Son of Man and of his words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his glory*. There is too often a keeping silence from good words, but without any of that pain and grief of which David complained as the

consequence of his forced reserve. How few could appeal like him to God, to bear testimony to their conscientious discharge of duty in this particular. *Lo ! I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest* ⁸.

It is, indeed, remarkable how much the language of the Israelitish law is at variance with the opinions of those who connect the ideas of hypocrisy or affectation with every introduction of subjects relating to God. 'These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up ⁹.' There is no reason to suppose that these injunctions were not intended to be taken in a literal sense; and when it is considered how

⁸ Ps. xl. 9.

⁹ Deut. vi. 6, 7. See also xi. 19. 1 Chron. xvi. 24. Archbishop Secker judiciously observes, that it is not meant that our conversation should be of nothing but religion; but that religion should have a due share in it.

difficult it is to act up to their spirit in the present state of society, it contrasts very painfully the difference between the world as it actually is, and as God meant it to be.

3. Lastly, our Saviour's example teaches us how to 'use knowledge aright' for the purposes of promoting the cause of truth and of disseminating the seeds of Christian principle. For though the abuse of the tongue be a deadly evil, it is an instrument which if employed in the work of edification may communicate life from circle to circle, and be the medium of imparting blessings, the influence of which may extend beyond the sphere of our immediate observation.

In fact, our conversation is in general a very faithful symptom of the state of the heart. A man will naturally be telling of the things which interest him most, and in proportion as he experiences the comfort of religious truths in his own person, he will be anxious to make others participate in the same saving knowledge, and

to extend the kingdom of Christ through all his connections. *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and a good man out of the treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.*

CHAPTER VII.

The Tenderness of Christ's Ministry.

THE character of the Mosaic dispensation was of a nature highly penal. All its institutions were rendered effective by the enactment of certain proportional punishments to which transgressors became liable; and the sentences carried into execution upon Nadab and Abihu, on the worshippers of Baal-peor, and the golden calf, on Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and on the blasphemer and sabbath-breaker, are sufficient to show that whoever violated the known stipulation of the law, was actually subjected to all its rigours. 'He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy under one or two witnesses.' And though it was permitted that for lesser transgressions a trespass-offering should be made, yet the disabilities under which the offenders laboured for a time; and the burdensome nature of the ceremonies by which

they were restored to legal purification, would strongly tend to inspire a feeling of preference for a new covenant of love, which should supersede the pains and penalties of the Mosaic code. What the spirit of that code was, may be collected from the confession of St. Paul, who having been brought up in its principles at the feet of Gamaliel, and of the strictest sect, a Pharisee, candidly allows that it was a 'ministration of condemnation' and death, and 'gendered unto bondage'.¹ Indeed the circumstances under which the law was delivered are strikingly descriptive of the character of the whole dispensation. They that heard the voice 'intreated that the word should not be spoken unto them any more; (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain it shall be stoned or thrust through with a dart :) and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake'.²

¹ Gal. iv. 24.

² Heb. xii. 19—21.

Now the Christian dispensation was so essentially different in all respects, that its distinctive characters are undoubtedly mercy and love. Its very name proclaimed the glad tidings of the new covenant, and prepared an expectation of something more suitable to the necessities of man, than the world had experienced under the law of Moses. Nor were these hopes disappointed when its gracious terms were revealed by the divine prophet of the church. The very foundation of the whole system represents the Father as 'reconciled to the world' by the death of his Son—the enmity abolished—the curse of the law taken away—believers 'justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses'—comforted with joy unspeakable, and filled with a peace which passeth all understanding. The whole scheme of the Gospel, conceived and executed as a pledge of the divine love to man, is from first to last a scheme of tenderness and mercy. It provided for those who required the fostering care of some arm strong enough to help them in their hour of need—it gave light

to the spiritually blind—it gave liberty to the captives under the yoke of Satan—it gave life to the dead in trespasses and sin. In a word, ‘by the bringing-in of a better hope,’ the ministry which was established under the new economy became known by the cheering title of the *ministry of reconciliation*, and its members were charged to deliver, as the peculiar message of their founder, that ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for it’—and that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them’³.

It would have been highly inconsistent with such a dispensation, if its promulgator had not been distinguished for tender and compassionate feelings; or had God, in proclaiming it, displayed himself again to the world in the same overwhelming manner which had formerly caused the Israelites to intreat that the word should not be spoken to them any more, if ac-

³ John, iii. 16. 2 Cor. v. 19.

accompanied by the same terrible appearances. 'Let not God speak unto us lest we die.' 'If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die⁴.'

Indulgent to this prayer, God sent his Son clothed in all the gentle attributes which could attract or conciliate. He came not as a mighty conqueror, not as a king or a judge invested with the pomp and authority of human power, but meek and lowly and humble, as the Saviour of mankind, the deliverer from the dominion of Satan and the sentence of death. He came not with his rod and sword, the emblems of judgment, to terrify, but bearing his cross, and bowed down under the weight of the iniquities of his people, which the decree of his Father had laid upon him. He came, in short, fulfilling that beautiful feature in his prophetic character which was foretold by Isaiah—*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.*

⁴ Ex. xx. 19. Deut. v. 25.

In order that the full value of this mode of our Lord's assumption of human nature might be manifested to the world in the strongest light, it was wisely ordained that the habits and manners of his forerunner should be of a diametrically opposite character.

Every thing about John's outward demeanour and appearance was studiously plain and austere; and to denote the rigour of his separation from the ordinary habits of mankind, he was a Nazarite from his birth, drinking neither wine nor strong drink; and subject in a more than common degree to all the severities of the order. By the direction of the angel a name was given him which none of his kindred had borne, intimating perhaps in part that they must not expect to experience from him that interchange of domestic society, which passes between relations. For there is reason to believe, from an expression in St. Luke^s, that he not only lived in total retirement in the most unfrequented parts of the country, but that he

^s Luke, i. 80.

was separated at an early age even from his parents. Thus much at least is certain, that not one of the Evangelists gives a single intimation of his holding any intercourse with his family, even after he had entered on the course of his ministry, and when the end had been obtained which was the cause of his previous seclusion. Again, there was a roughness in his whole preaching, which, if not intended to answer a particular purpose, would almost seem calculated to frustrate the object of his appearance. There was originally more external readiness to hear him, than our Lord met with ; but on seeing the multitude flock to his baptism, he addressed them in language which would have the effect of discouraging rather than attracting followers. 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.' His very next observation is directed against their most favourite and deeply-rooted prejudice, and would certainly not have been received by them with friendly feelings. 'Think not to say within yourselves, we have

Abraham to our father⁶. Nor did he attempt to conciliate his disciples by showing any indulgence to the weakness of their newly imbibed principles. They were made to fast often, and taught to pray frequently, and to submit themselves without murmuring to all the hardships of the abstemious and ascetic life of their master.

The whole personal character and behaviour of Jesus was so strikingly different, that his enemies took occasion to found a reproach on the contrast thus exhibited between the Son of Man and his messenger. 'John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, he hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.' 'They said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make long prayers . . . but thine eat and drink?' Wisdom, urged our Saviour

⁶ Matt. iii. 7—9.

⁷ Luke, vii. 33, 34. v. 33.

in reply to these objections, is justified of her children. He condescended to open a way into the hearts of his disciples by winning their affections, and thus, according to the apostolical precept, 'pleased his neighbour for his good to edification.' 'For,' as St. Paul continues, 'even Christ pleased not himself, but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me^s.' He sanctioned by his example all the kindly feelings of our nature, and left for the imitation of the Christian a pattern of the manner in which, as a son, a relation, or a friend, the demands of society should be fulfilled; how the mutual charities which tend to strengthen and endear the ties of domestic life should be attended to; how the affections of the heart should be cherished and cultivated by all who desire to be conformed to the image of their Redeemer.

The pleasing medium through which Christ is thus exhibited to our contemplations, in all the tenderness of his personal character, brings

^s Rom. xv. 2, 3.

him at once within the scope of our affections, and renders him an object of our love as our friend, as well as our Saviour. His sympathy with human feelings is the very groundwork of the confidence through which we 'come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy.' 'For,' as the Apostle argues, 'we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities?'

Not that it was necessary that Christ should take upon him our flesh in order to understand its nature, and become conscious that it needed the intercession of a compassionate advocate. As God, he must have been acquainted with it from the beginning, and his personal experience could have added nothing to the intimate knowledge he possessed of the frailties of those whose form he voluntarily assumed. But it would be difficult for man to understand how so great and unapproachable a spirit as God could stoop so

° Heb. iv. 15.

low as to enter into the feelings and make allowance for the infirmities of his creatures.

It became therefore of the utmost consequence, that the conviction of his sympathy with our condition should be impressed on our minds by such proof of his past condescension, as would be sufficient to establish in us a firm belief of his tender regard for mankind. Hence the propriety of his having been made like unto us, that when we contemplate him in his character of mediator, we may divest him as it were of his divine attributes, and apply with more freedom to our advocate, who, before he passed into the heavens, was in all things tempted like as we are. We can now understand as well as believe, that Christ, although exalted to the right hand of his Father, continues to feel the same tenderness for his church which distinguished him while on earth. As a pledge that he always identifies himself with the cause of his followers, we can dwell on his question to Saul when journeying to Damascus

—‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*’?¹

It was against the disciples of the Lord that this zealous enemy of the new religion had been breathing out threatenings and slaughter; but the Lord was pleased to look upon the persecutions inflicted on them as if they had been offered directly to himself, and charges the author of their sufferings with the crime of having fought against God in person—‘I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.’ The idea of Christ’s union with his people, and of his participation in their interests, is thus brought home to the mind, and becomes an additional motive for love to such a compassionate Saviour.

It is to this feature in our Lord’s character that the Evangelists refer, when any striking instances of his mercy is mentioned. Did he look complacently upon the hopeful points in the character of the young man who came to him running, and asking how he might inherit

¹ Acts, ix. 4.

eternal life? St. Mark tells us, it was because 'Jesus, beholding him, loved him'.² Did he give proof of his power over death by restoring Lazarus again to his family? It was because 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus'.³ Was he desirous in his last conversation with the Apostles to omit no topic which could edify, or comfort, or support them under their approaching state of bereavement? It was because he knowing 'that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end'.⁴ Did he so far forget his own sufferings in the moment of his last agony, as to provide for the support of his mother and the alleviation of her sorrows during the remainder of the days of her widowhood? It was to the 'disciple whom Jesus loved,' that he recommended her for protection, as a last token of his confidence in the strength and permanence of his follower's attachment. Did he wish to convey

² Mark, x. 21.

³ John, xi. 5.

⁴ John, xiii. 1.

some idea to his disciples of the extent and nature of his own regard for them? He could find no fitter measure for it than by comparing it with the love of God for his only begotten Son—‘As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you⁵.’ It is through his love that we have spiritual strength—‘In all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us⁶.’ It is through the same love that we are provided with his intercession in our behalf through all eternity.

But above all, it was his love which produced that voluntary abasement and sacrifice of himself which made satisfaction for the sins of the world—‘We live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us.’ ‘Christ hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling savour.’ ‘Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests

⁵ John, xv. 9.

⁶ Rom. viii. 37.

unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen? And how is this love enhanced when we think what those are, on whom it is bestowed! Tenderness shown to man in his fallen state, is surely the highest exercise of the feeling—‘ Yet herein God commended his love unto us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’

Again, Christ gave as the distinguishing badge of his religion the precept of love, which was to know no limit, and to be restricted by no exception. ‘ A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.’ ‘ I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.’ And as the large concessions which moralists were in the habit of making to the human heart, rendered it necessary that the law should be accompanied by particular remarks

⁷ Gal. ii. 20. Eph. v. 2. Rom. i. 5, 6.

⁸ John, xiii. 34. Matt. v. 44.

as to its extent, it was declared, that with the spirit and meaning of such a commandment, every angry or revengeful feeling, every unforgiving or persevering temper, every malicious thought or uncharitable emotion, is at utter variance. So beautifully does the religion of Christ provide for the amelioration of the moral character, by disallowing and eradicating all those disfiguring passions which make the heart of man to be fruitful in evil, instead of the seat of love, and the image of its Creator.

As then the human ministry of Jesus was founded on his love and tenderness for mankind, there would have been a manifest inconsistency between the founder of the religion and the religion itself, if the tenor of his personal character had not coincided with the object of his mission. It was in the natural order of things that a messenger sent on an errand of mercy should go about doing good; and that he who announced his yoke as easy, and his burden as light, should appear as the mild and compassionate teacher of divine truth. Had he come

as a judge, he would have been surrounded with the terrors and penalties of the law, or as a king he would have been encompassed with the majesty of sovereign power; but the softer accents of peace and pardon, and the glad tidings of reconciliation, and the gracious promises of the Gospel, were far more characteristic of him who came in the office of the beneficent prophet of the church, and was waited for as the *consolation of Israel*.

But the tenderness of Jesus, which never failed to display itself on every fit occasion, was not suffered to interfere with his faithfulness in discharging the errand of his ministry. When opportunity required, there was as much plain dealing in his preaching, as at other times there was deference to the feelings of his hearers in things indifferent.

Nothing discouraged the Jews more than the removal of their false conceptions respecting the nature of his kingdom. Yet Christ never shrunk from declaring openly, that 'his king-

dom was not of this world.' Nothing offended the apostles so much as the idea of their Master's sufferings and death. Yet, though 'sorrow had filled their hearts,' Christ was so far from avoiding the topic, that his conversations were perpetually directed to convince them that 'it was expedient for them that he should go away'.⁹ Nothing could have been more likely to have staggered the faith of new converts, than to have a vivid description placed before their minds of the persecutions they would be called upon to endure for righteousness' sake. Yet Christ foretold in the most explicit and undisguised manner the usage with which they must expect to meet in the world, as the recompense of their attachment to him. Nothing could be more respectful than his ordinary demeanor to the constituted authorities—to Caesar—were to be rendered the things of Caesar—and when accused of the chief priests and elders before Pilate, he answered nothing. But when it became necessary to rebuke the crafty policy of Herod,

⁹ John, xvi. 6, 7.

he did not scruple to designate him by a strong term of reproach, intimating his secret knowledge of the deceitfulness of his character. ‘*Go ye and tell that fox*, behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected’.¹

Our Lord's example, therefore, teaches, that there are cases where kindness becomes misplaced, and indulgence criminal; and that a salutary firmness in reproof is not inconsistent with the truest exercise of Christian love.

The message sent to Herod was, however, marked by a degree of severity very unusual with our Lord. Frequently as he had to repress the insults of the unfriendly, or to correct the misconceptions of the ignorant, his answers are always remarkable for that heavenly mildness which never forsook him even in the most trying scenes. This spirit was never more touchingly displayed than in cases where his disciples were

¹ Luke, xiii. 32.

concerned. When Peter denied him, he upbraided him for his apostacy only by a look. *The Lord turned and looked upon him.* When Judas betrayed him, his only reproach was conveyed by the use of a term which must have reminded the conscience of the traitor of the familiar relation in which he stood to his lord. '*Friend*, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' When Thomas doubted, instead of giving him up to unbelief, he granted the additional testimony which the Apostle required, and gently cautioned him *to be not faithless, but believing.*

The same thing may be observed in our Lord's reply to James and John, when they made their ill-timed request for temporal honours in the supposed kingdom of their Master. The presumption and ignorance which they evinced in making such a demand, and the self-confidence with which they expressed their ability to undertake the responsible situations at which they aimed, might have justly deserved a severe rebuke. But instead of chiding them for what

was amiss, Christ kindly notices the spirit of attachment which dictated their answer to his question, and without dwelling on their mistaken notions, seems willing to point out the way by which they might attain to higher honours than those which their ambition had desired¹.

A similar spirit is displayed in the reply to Pilate on the judgement-seat,—*he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin*—intimating, that a distinction would be taken in his favour between the guilt of the judge in yielding to the importunity of the multitude, and the guilt of the multitude in clamouring for the execution of an innocent person. If taken singly, these instances of kind forbearance on the part of our Lord would be sufficient to justify the assertion of the Apostle, that ‘we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;’ but viewed together they establish a character of consistent and considerate meek-

¹ Mark, x. 35—40.

ness, which is altogether without parallel in the history of mankind.

It will also appear that the tenderness of Christ was not so much manifested on the occasions which call forth sympathy in general, as on those by which the sensibility of the greater part of mankind is rarely excited.

Who are the characters that the world generally loves and admires, and for whom it reserves the greatest share of its friendship or approbation? Those whose qualifications coincide with some standard established by the authority of current opinion—who are distinguished by situation, or personal advantages, or wealth, or some other adventitious recommendation—who are lively in their feelings, jealous of their reputation, prompt in avenging supposed affronts on their honour, eager in the pursuit of pleasure, insensible of personal danger.

But these are not the qualifications of the friends of our Saviour, whose praise is in all the

churches. It is the poor in spirit and they that mourn, the weak and they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, whom Christ commends, and on whom he pronounces his blessing. He warned his disciples that they should not despise one of the little ones; for every one of them, however low and neglected among men in general, enjoyed special tokens of the divine favour. He did not call around him the rich and mighty and noble, though he was far from discouraging or repulsing their advances, but he invited by a particular address those who laboured and were heavy laden, to come to him for rest to their souls. Nor was it to the world at large that he promised the manifestation of himself, and the love of his Father, but to those of whatever class or whatever degree who kept his commandments³.

Those, therefore, who are not commonly looked upon as objects of pity, seem to have attracted, perhaps for the sake of affording a

³ John, xiv. 21.

lesson to men, a more than ordinary portion of our Lord's attention. It was the leper, who was avoided as the outcast of his nation, and whose very presence was shunned, as a source of defilement and reproach, whom he selected on account of his hopeless condition as a fit subject for the exercise of his almighty power. It was with the publicans and sinners, with whom others thought it disgraceful to hold any intercourse, that he freely associated, because they were the persons who most required to be benefited by communion with him. To the good, even among men, it is no ordinary trial to be called upon in the course of their duty to associate with individuals of profligate character, and to hear during their necessary connexion with the world opinions professed, which are entirely at variance with their own religious belief. But how much more acutely must our Saviour have felt on such occasions, whose nature must have instinctively revolted from impurity of every kind, and whose own character was exposed to suspicion, because he did not

think it beneath him to call to repentance even the worst of men ⁴.

The Evangelists concur in representing that it was principally for others that Christ's concern was manifested, though he was not exempted from sorrows even on his own account. Like David, 'rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because men kept not his law ⁵.' He was 'moved with compassion' for the multitudes, because they fainted for lack of knowledge, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. He was 'grieved' for proud and prejudiced unbelievers—for the hardness of heart of the Pharisees—for the miseries about to come on Jerusalem in consequence of her persecuting and rebellious spirit—for the sin of his murderers, in whose behalf he uttered, in the midst of his own sufferings, that extenuating prayer—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* ⁶. Though himself emphatically a man of sorrows,

⁴ Luke, vii. 37—47.

⁵ Ps. cxix. 136.

⁶ Matt. ix. 36. Mark, iii. 5. Luke, xix. 41—44. xxiii.

and acquainted with grief, yet one of the strongest expressions of feeling ascribed by the Evangelists to our Lord, was occasioned by the obstinate unbelief of the Pharisees. ‘He *sighed deeply* in his heart, and saith, why doth this generation seek after a sign?’ He wept indeed at the grave of Lazarus; but his tears were probably far more excited by the thoughts of that wretchedness which sin had brought into the world, and of which the scene immediately before his eyes was so striking an instance, than by that sorrow of the bystanders which was so soon to be turned into joy⁷. Indeed, St. John expressly attributes his grief to the want of faith of the Jews who distrusted the extent of his power after the many miracles they had witnessed. ‘Some of them said, Could not this man which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died. Jesus *therefore again groaning in himself*, cometh to the grave.’

⁷ Mark, viii. 12.

⁸ John, xi. 33—38.

The circumstances of this case were in fact such as would touch every tender feeling in the heart of our compassionate High Priest. Those were around him whom he loved more than his own life, for whose sake he had left the bosom of the Father, and had renounced the adoration of all the hosts of heaven, to become the object of scorn and persecution on earth. But of all that multitude whom curiosity or interest had collected round the grave of Lazarus, not one was filled with a proper sense of the character of Him who had taken up his residence in the flesh among them, or was influenced by any confiding belief in his unlimited rule over the spirits of quick and dead. The disciples were so far from expecting any extraordinary reversal of the laws of nature, that on the proposition of Thomas (v. 16), they had gone that they might die with their Master, conceiving that he would be exposed to unusual danger from the vicinity of Bethany to Jerusalem. Neither Martha nor Mary thought that the power of Jesus could avail to heal their brother, without his personal presence, much less to restore him to life after

his actual decease, though neither of them hesitated to acknowledge that if he had been there, Lazarus had not died (vss. 21 and 32). The remaining spectators openly murmured against the apparent limitation of that power which had sufficed to bestow sight upon the blind, but seemed unequal to the performance of a miracle the consequences of which would be still more beneficial.

With these instances of human frailty in his sight, well might Jesus groan in the spirit and be troubled at the veil which sin had cast over the understandings of men, and lament the infirmities from which even his most familiar associates were not exempt. And how infinitely is the condescension manifested by him enhanced, when we consider on whom it was bestowed. Tenderness shown towards man in his fallen state is surely the highest exercise of the feeling. Yet *herein God commended his love towards us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Upon several occasions our Lord referred to the miracles which he wrought, as one of the tests of his divine mission. Now it would have been sufficient for this purpose, had they been nothing more than abstract exertions of supernatural power. The evidence derived from them would have been equally strong, had they only consisted of such acts as causing stones to be made bread for the relief of his own personal wants, or casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple to demonstrate that he was secure from harm under the ministration of attendant angels. He might have proved his dominion over the elements by walking on the water when no urgent danger of his friends required his presence, or by calming the sea when his disciples were not exposed to its fury. He might have called down fire from heaven, according to the suggestion of his disciples, to consume his enemies, or he might have struck down to the ground in a moment the servant of the high priest, instead of healing his ear with a touch, and restraining the unseasonable violence of Peter.

Besides, waiving these considerations, historical precedents might have warranted the expectation that miraculous power would be evinced rather by acts calculated to awe and terrify, than by acts of mercy. When Moses was ordered to give proof by means of signs that the Lord had appeared unto him, and had sent him to Pharaoh, it was by destructive plagues, and the loss of the first-born of the land, that he produced an unwilling conviction of the truth of his commission. When Ahaziah sent messengers to Elijah, the prophet established his authority as a man of God by twice calling down fire from heaven to consume the captains and their fifties.

But it was more consistent with the tenor of our Saviour's character, to produce the same general result in another way. It is true, that except he did signs and wonders the people would not believe; but the miracles which he worked for their conviction were miracles of beneficence, and his power was commonly exerted on those very persons who from the nature of their disorder, or its inveteracy, were the

greatest objects of compassion. It was the man who had been blind from his birth, or the patient who had been afflicted with an infirmity thirty-eight years, or the only son of a widow, or the woman who had spent all her substance on physicians without relief, who experienced that there was authority given to their benefactor to stop the progress of disease, and suspend the ordinary course of nature. It is true of every action of his life, that he 'shewed his almighty power most chiefly by shewing mercy and pity.'

A similar spirit prevailed in his choice of the powers with which he gifted the apostles and seventy disciples, on sending them forth before him into the cities of the Jews. They were to heal the sick,—to cleanse the lepers,—to raise the dead,—to cast out devils. The authenticity of their commission was to be established by the benefits conferred through their medium; but if those benefits failed of effecting the desired impression, they were not authorized to resort to any acts of a different tendency in order to pro-

duce conviction by terror, or by the infliction of judgements. If any house or city refused to receive them, they were simply ordered to depart from it, and to shake off the dust from their feet, as a token against its inhabitants. After Christ's death, Ananias and Sapphira, Herod, and Elymas the sorcerer, were all rendered examples that the Lord's hand was as able to strike as it had been to save; but during his own ministry not a single instance occurred in which he laid aside the compassionate character of a Saviour to assume the severer part of an avenger or judge.

There is also a perfect analogy in this respect between the language of our Lord and his actions. The tone of kindness which was manifested in all his discourses, coincided uniformly with the gracious errand of his ministry. I allude particularly to his frequent use of the word '*son*⁹'; and to the strength and variety of the terms he employed to designate the nature

⁹ Matt. ix. 2, 22. Mark, x. 24. John, xiii. 33. xxi. 5.

of his affection for those whom he was about to redeem with his precious blood. The same feeling prevailed in the condescending notice which he took of the poor widow who cast her two mites into the treasury¹. It may also be observed in the subject of many of his parables—especially in those of the lost sheep, and lost piece of money, of the good Samaritan, and of the ungrateful servant—parables which could only have been conceived by a mind wherein love towards man was the ruling principle.

Tenderness to others, if it be not founded upon, is at least inseparable from an absence of all selfish feeling. Regardless, therefore, as our Lord was of personal privations, he was too thoughtful of the wants of others to expose them to trials from which, at the same time, he never shrunk himself. Though on seeing that the multitudes who flocked around him had nothing to eat, he had compassion on them and worked a miracle in their behalf, yet he listened

¹ Mark, xii. 42.

so little to the demands of his own nature in a similar situation, that he talked with the woman of Samaria with as much energy and patience as if he had not been previously wearied with his journey, and in want of the refreshment which the apostles were gone to seek. There would have been also, had he chosen to avail himself of it, a plausible pretence for declining to enter into a discussion, even if the woman, instead of our Lord, had made the first advances to a conversation. For the very act of talking with a Samaritan was considered as such an extraordinary instance of condescension in a Jew, that the woman herself remarked it with surprise; and when his disciples returned they were only restrained from inquiring the cause of such an unusual occurrence, by an habitual deference to their Lord's authority².

A similar observation will apply to his conduct to the apostles who were witnesses of his passion. Their eyes were heavy, and in spite of

² John, iv. 9, 27.

repeated warnings, he three times came and found them sleeping. Such an apparent want of sympathy with their Master, when the hour of his distress was weighing upon his mind with so much bitterness, might well have justified, and perhaps might even have seemed to call for, the language of reproof. But, touched as he was with his own trials, his pity for human frailty restrained him from uttering any thing stronger than an expostulation, directed particularly to Peter, who had so lately protested his fidelity, and couched rather in the gentlest terms of surprise, than of rebuke. *What, could ye not watch with me one hour*³?

When this expression fell from our Lord, the Evangelist tells us he was *in an agony*. Such was the extremity of his mental suffering, that the powers of his body were scarcely sufficient to bear up against it. Men are apt to excuse themselves for momentary expressions of unkindness or peevishness, under the pretence that

³ Matt. xxvi. 40.

they proceeded from temporary irritation, or the pressure of accidental distress. But from the contemplation of the habitual temper of Christ, who at such an hour did not forget to be gracious, let us learn, even in the unhappiest moments of life, to practise that forbearance in our intercourse with others, of which we ourselves stand in daily need from them, as well as from God. That weight of sorrow which affected our Lord so powerfully in the garden of Gethsemane, was foreseen by him in all its intensity, before he set his face to go up to Jerusalem. His human nature must have shrunk from the anticipation; yet with the view of gradually familiarizing the minds of his disciples to the idea of his sufferings, he dwelt on the subject in his conversations unceasingly, and shewed an indulgence to their weakness which he denied to his own personal feelings. In a word, he dealt with his little flock like Jacob with his family, on his journey to Succoth. He knew that the children were tender, and the flocks and herds with young were with him, and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock

would die⁴.' He, therefore, 'led on softly, according as they were able to endure,' and made provision for the continuance of the same spirit among his ministers by his affectionate charge to Peter, to 'feed his lambs⁵.'

It deserves remark, that Christ never delayed an act of mercy. There is not a single instance recorded of his sending away applicants for relief, because they troubled him. In the case of the dropsical man who was brought to him while he was entertained in the house of one of the Pharisees, many reasons seemed to concur to induce him to defer the miracle. A plan had been systematically arranged for entrapping him, in which his host had probably joined with others of his sect, and while he sat at meat 'they watched him'—a point to which St. Luke calls attention in a particular manner. It was the sabbath, and umbrage had been taken shortly before at a cure which our Lord had performed in the synagogue on that day. A delay of a

⁴ Gen. xxxiii. 13.
xxi. 15.

⁵ Gr. *ἀγνία* agnellos. John,

few hours, till those persons had withdrawn, whose presence was dangerous, or till the season of holy rest, for which they professed so much jealousy, had passed, would apparently have been of little consequence to the object of our Lord's compassion, whose disorder was probably of long standing, and who would have thankfully accepted any hope of relief, which he might have been encouraged to expect on a future and not distant day. But Christ was not to be deterred from his purpose of mercy by a mode of reasoning which would have been of sufficient weight to have prevailed with one who was less intent on going about to do good. Regardless of the consequences to himself, where the life or comfort of another was concerned, he took him, and healed him, and let him go⁶.

This was an act seemingly much more likely to awaken all the jealousy of the rulers than most of those cures which our Lord so frequently desired might be concealed from their

⁶ Luke, xiv. 1—4.

knowledge, lest, as the prohibition is generally accounted for, a premature attempt should be made on his life, or the people should raise him to a temporal kingdom. May we not, therefore, consider with more propriety that Christ's injunction was founded on other causes than those generally assigned, and that at least sometimes it originated in tenderness to the safety of others rather than of himself. The odium which fell on him was naturally transferred to his followers; and those whom he had benefited so signally by curing their diseases would, of course, become the objects of the hatred and persecution of the Pharisees. Would our Lord endanger their faith, and expose them to the difficulties which all his friends were called to encounter, at least until a longer acquaintance with their benefactor had prepared them to take all things patiently, and to suffer for his sake? We are told at one time, that among the chief rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees even they did not venture to confess him openly, lest they

should be put out of the synagogue. Inconveniences, therefore, and perhaps dangers, were to be apprehended by those who spread the report of a new miracle; and on the supposition that the motive which has been suggested had any weight with him, Christ would confer on those whom he had healed the additional benefit of shielding them from the resentment of the Jews, by dispensing with an open acknowledgement of their gratitude when no important object was to be obtained by giving publicity to their cure. He who could shew so much anxiety to vindicate the woman who poured the precious ointment on him from the indignation of his disciples, would be still more desirous of protecting those whom he had miraculously restored to health from the worse consequences which might be expected to arise from the anger of the chief priests and Pharisees.

In concluding the view of this feature in our Lord's character, a few remarks of a practical tendency may be added.

1. The tenderness of Christ for his people is an earnest of his eternal faithfulness to their cause and interests. It is a pledge of the continuance of his care for his brethren by redemption. It is a testimony that he will *love them unto the end*.

Seasons will occur in the progress of the Christian through the wilderness of the world, when he will stand in need of the comfort to be derived from this reflection. For although the nature of Christ's love is such that it cannot be removed from him, unless he voluntarily renounce belief in him as a Saviour, and obedience to him as a lawgiver, yet it may be eclipsed as it were, for a little moment, and the soul may be dejected by the apparent withdrawing of his favour from it.

Under such a trial we can be supported only by the consciousness of the unchangeable permanency of the affections of our Redeemer. It is then that we learn the unspeakable value of those truths which the Gospel alone reveals, and

which constitute its peculiar and exclusive treasure—that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*—that *we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities*—and that *his love is stronger than death*. It was the promise of God to Solomon respecting the temple, ‘mine eye and my heart shall be there perpetually’.⁷ It is the Christian’s privilege to rejoice in the same assurance, and, like St. Paul, he triumphs in the certainty that, ‘notwithstanding, the Lord stands with him’.⁸ We too often forfeit the blessings of this union by the waywardness of our own affections, and the insensibility to spiritual things which takes possession of the mind; for where there is no sympathy in tastes, there can be no tenderness in friendship. ‘Can two walk together except they be agreed?’⁹ and yet it is to be feared, that Christ might frequently expostulate with us in the language addressed to one of the ungrateful of old—*Is this thy kindness to thy friend*? He stretches out his arms to us, as formerly to the

⁷ 2 Chron. vii. 16.

⁹ Amos, iii. 3.

⁸ 2 Tim. iv. 17.

¹ 2 Chron. xxiv. 22.

chosen people of his adoption; but too often finds us, like them, a disobedient and gainsaying generation.

Nor must it be forgotten, that external union does not necessarily imply a real harmony of feelings, and that it by no means happens that all those who are outwardly members of Christ's visible church on earth, will also necessarily be subjects of his spiritual kingdom in heaven. There is reason to fear that, in point of fact, a practical error on this subject prevails more extensively than can be readily supposed by those who have not had an opportunity of witnessing—what the duties of parochial clergy lead them to witness daily—the miserable shifts to which the human heart will have recourse in order to stifle its conviction of the wrath of God against sin. But, if the remark be not too fanciful for sober exhortation, let it be remembered, that as Judas walked with our Lord during his personal ministry, without imbibing any portion of the spirit of his Master, so there may be even now external companionship without any actual

participation of interests, and much apparent intercourse, without congenial feeling, and real assimilation of principle. The distinction which the Apostle pointed out among the Jews, prevails also among those who have been nominally admitted into the Christian covenant. *They are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children. For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*².

2. Our Lord's example seems to put a strong mark of condemnation on any undue harshness in the discharge of the duties of the Christian teacher.

To win by love, and not to constrain by terror, should be the aim of him who is privileged

² Rom. ix. 6, 7. ii. 28, 29.

to serve in what is characteristically termed, 'the ministry of reconciliation.' The prevailing tone of his own exhortations should be regulated by meditation on that gracious tenderness with which Christ laboured to bring sinners to a sense of the heinousness of guilt. He should not be irritated by the weakness of those for whom he is interested, but provide, as far as in him lies, against the temptations to which they are exposed, by intercessory prayer in their behalf. It is a proof either of listlessness of feeling very unbecoming him who should watch over the souls of others as one who must give account, or of culpable indifference to the eternal interests of a fellow-creature, whenever there is not much sorrow for a fallen brother, as well as much charity in the treatment of his case with a view to reclaim him. Noah's righteous soul was vexed day by day with the ungodly deeds around him, and Jeremiah wept day and night for the slain of the daughter of his people³.

³ Jer. ix. 1. See also xiii. 7. Rom. ix. 1—3.

There is, however, much in human nature that hinders us from feeling the influence of this brotherly sympathy as we ought; and instead of hoping even against hope, or forgiving till seventy times seven, we are too often dispirited at the first unfavourable symptom, and silenced or estranged by a single trespass. A deep consciousness of our own frailty will best promote tenderness in our behaviour to others, whom we wish to bring back, like the lost sheep to the fold, or as the prodigal son to the house of his father. The Israelites were enjoined not to oppress a stranger, inasmuch as they had experienced themselves the miseries of the situation, and 'knew the heart of a stranger, seeing they were strangers in the land of Egypt'.⁴ The spirit of the precept, as well as of many others under the old law which appeared to have only a temporary force, is of universal application. An obligation of the same kind is virtually laid on the Christian to 'have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity'.⁵

⁴ Ex. xxiii. 9.

⁵ Heb. v. 2.

It is thus that the imitation of Christ's example will bring us to the same conclusion at which the Apostle arrives by a different mode of argument. He pronounces in a more authoritative way than is usual with him—'We then that are strong *ought* to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves⁶.' And again, in another place, he appeals to the conscience of the Corinthians, whether 'through their knowledge should the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died⁷.'

3. Real tenderness, according to our Lord's exemplification of the quality, will manifest itself in a way which rather differs from the ordinary mode of estimating it.

It will not be seen so much in the mere act of indulgence, as in the steady pursuit of what is most conducive to the true interest of others. It will not always take present happiness or immediate good as the measure of that interest,

⁶ Rom. xv. 1.

⁷ 1 Cor. viii. 11.

but it will look onward with a prospective view to the wants of eternity, and will consider that to be the highest exercise of love which provides an immortal soul with the means of laying up treasure in heaven. Our Lord calls upon Peter to testify his love by the tenderness of his concern for his weaker brethren—*Lovest thou me? feed my sheep*—as if such a charge were the employment which would be most congenial to his feelings, and most consistent with his renewed professions of attachment to his heavenly master. The connexion too which St. Paul establishes between his love for the converts and his earnestness for their spiritual welfare is very prominently insisted on. *God is witness, that being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to impart unto you not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye should walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory*⁸.

⁸ 1 Thess. ii. 8.

4. Lastly, a few words may be added respecting a false view which is sometimes taken of the nature of Christ's character.

There is a tendency in men who are conscious that they have offended against the light of the Gospel, to overlook in the richness of its promises that the wrath of God is declared against all unrighteousness, on the same authority which offers pardon and salvation to the penitent. They are willing to suppose, that because he desires not the death of a sinner, he will forbear to punish him.

But the tenderness of Christ, unbounded as it is, will never be suffered to interfere with his justice. Had it been otherwise, he would not have stooped to take upon himself the infirmities of the human nature, or have submitted to death upon the cross. There is not a single expression in the Holy Scriptures which can warrant the belief that the mercy of our Saviour will be extended to one who tempts him so presumptuously as to persist in wilful sin. *Despisest thou*

*the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance*⁹?

The covenant of the new dispensation is a covenant of love founded upon the free gift of salvation;—but, at the same time, it is a covenant of indispensable holiness. The tenderness of its author is shown in the forgiveness of repented and forsaken sin, but not in permitting a continuance in transgression. There is nothing like connivance at crime in the principles of the Gospel. Through its medium, on the contrary, ‘mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.’ For, the very restoration of man to the favour of the Father, implies a restoration to the image of his likeness,—a restoration to a capacity of increasing in heavenly wisdom,—a restoration to a state from which spirituality and holiness are inseparable; and redemption, by the evident analogy of the metaphor, presupposes a right to

⁹ Rom. ii. 4.

the services of those who have been bought with a price.

The tenderness of our High Priest, therefore, is a sufficient motive for appealing to his compassion for the remission of sins, and the gift of eternal life ; but will neither authorize us to entertain any reasonable hope while we remain alienated from him in affection and pursuits, nor warrant our continuing in sin, that grace may abound.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Prudence of Christ's Ministry.

THE Gospels ascribe to our Lord several express directions on the subject of the prudence which ought to be observed in the discharge of ministerial duties. Of this nature are the following passages.

‘ Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.’ ‘ Beware of men When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.’ ‘ Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves.’ ‘ Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season?’¹

¹ Matt. vii. 6. x. 16, 17, 23. xxiv. 45.

Now the moral to be inferred from these texts, is the importance of such a cautious observance of characters and times and places, as may prevent any unnecessary offence being reflected on the Christian ministry by an imprudent zeal not sufficiently tempered by circumspection and judgement.

Such a spirit was eminently needed by our Lord, as the prophet of a new dispensation. With every man's hand against him, with the brethren even of his own household for his foes, without a friend with whom he could take sweet counsel in his difficulties, deprived of the ordinary sources of human sympathy, which sustain and strengthen the mind in its moments of dejection, surrounded by men of different sects, who, though they differed in every other particular, conspired together in seeming harmony, and dissembled their personal animosities, for the purpose of indulging their common hatred against Christ, it was necessary for him to weigh every act and word with no common attention, and to sit as it were in previous judge-

ment on every thing which would fall under the observation of his adversaries. That he stood the test of such an ordeal, is a strong internal evidence of his divine mission. Subject a teacher, whose pretensions are merely human, to the same trial, and his incompetency to support it will be at once apparent.

With regard to our Lord, however, thus much is certain on the authority of witnesses who were never contradicted during their lifetime, and whose credit has remained unimpaired in spite of the attacks of the enemies of Christianity in succeeding ages. After the most diligent inquiry which malice could suggest, a ministry of three years duration could furnish to its determined opponents no plausible ground of complaint, on which an accusation could be founded with any tolerable hope of success. Had there been a single ebullition of intemperate zeal, it would have marked out its author as an enthusiast and fanatic, who required to be put down by the strong arm of the law out of regard to the security of the public. On

the other hand, had there been any appearance of lukewarmness in advocating the subject of his ministry, an excuse would have been furnished for the rejection of the Gospel, under the pretence of the apathy with which it was offered to the acceptance of the world. Again, had there been any ambiguity in the terms in which it was proposed, it would have been alleged that the incredulity of the people was owing to the mysterious manner in which the revelation had been introduced, and the want of clearness or simplicity in its conditions. Or, lastly, the conduct of our Lord would have been still more open to objection, if it had appeared to the political rulers of the nation that there had been any tampering with the multitude, to induce them to throw off their temporal allegiance, or if the most trifling expression could have been quoted which would bear a wrong interpretation, or be construed into a wish to change the order of civil government actually existing at the time of our Saviour's advent.

That Christ should have escaped all these dangers, can be ascribed to one cause alone—to the *grace of God which was upon him*—to the spirit of wisdom and prudence which was given him from above, and which as the Son of God, equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, he enjoyed without measure.

Some instances of our Lord's prudential discharge of his ministerial duties will place the truth of the preceding observations in its proper light.

I. A remarkable distinction must have been noticed between the manner in which Christ testified respecting himself at different times, and to different persons. The Jews demanded of him with an earnestness not unreasonable,—*How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly*². And upon other occasions similar questions were put to him with the avowed intention of drawing from him a declara-

² John, x. 24.

tion of the true nature of his character. '*Who art thou*'—'*Art thou the Christ, tell us ?*' '*Art thou the Son of God ?*' '*Whom makest thou thyself ?*' To all these challenges our Lord uniformly declined giving any explicit answer ; generally reminding the inquirer of some testimony which had been given at another time, or else referring to collateral evidences respecting his mission, which, if rightly understood, would make any further questions unnecessary. Even when the Baptist sent two of his disciples, asking,—'*Art thou he that should come ?*'—he only replied by commissioning the messengers to go and show John again those things which they had heard and seen, from which their master would be enabled to draw his own conclusions⁴.

Compare with this reserve, in which our Lord systematically persevered towards the Jews, the passage where he openly declares his dignity and character to their neighbours the

³ John, viii. 26. Luke, xxii. 67, 70.

⁴ Matt. xi. 2.

Samaritans. The woman saith unto him, 'I know that Messiah cometh, (which is called Christ) Jesus saith unto her, 'I that speak unto thee am he⁵.'

No more probable reason can be assigned for this extraordinary difference, than that our Lord, knowing perfectly the secret dispositions of both parties, saw that he should have risked an inconvenience in the one case, which he did not incur in the other. He had nothing to apprehend from the habitual feeling of the Samaritans. There was no ground for expecting that they would be excited to rebellion by the knowledge that Jesus was the Messiah; and therefore our Lord says to them plainly—*I am he*. But lest the Jews, who were eagerly watching for an opportunity of throwing off the Roman yoke, should attempt to raise him to the throne of David, he not only avoids any express assertion that he was the Christ, but orders those to

⁵ John, iv. 25, 26. The reason which Bishop Horsley gives for our Lord's openness on this occasion, appears to be less obvious and satisfactory.—See *Mant in loco*.

whom the fact had been revealed to conceal it. Or if he escaped this danger, he would encounter another not less formidable. His enemies would have been furnished with evidence to prove the accusation which, when they afterwards actually brought it against him, fell to the ground for want of proof. *They watched him, and sent forth spies which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a king*⁶.

The same system of precaution which governed our Lord on these occasions, had been adopted by him from the commencement of his preaching. For it was at an early period of his ministry that when he knew umbrage was taken by the Jewish rulers at the numbers who flocked

⁶ Luke, xx. 20. .xxiii. 2.

to him, ' he left Judea and departed into Galilee,' where their influence was not so great, in order to avoid their envy⁷.

It might be apprehended, on the other hand, that the line of conduct which our Lord pursued in maintaining this occasional reserve, would expose him to a charge of a different kind, which, however frivolous, would be not less prejudicial to the object of his mission and dangerous to his personal safety. His enemies might allege, with some colour of plausibility, that he taught one doctrine in private, and another in public; and that although he prudently forebore to bring forward invidious topics when surrounded by numerous witnesses, his communications to his followers when free from observation were of a very different character.

That an accusation of this nature would have been entertained without difficulty, had

⁷ John, iv. 3.

Christ afforded the slightest pretence for it, is abundantly certain from the odium which in the first ages of Christianity attached to the primitive believers on account of the love feasts. But not even Judas, the familiar companion of our Saviour's retirements, who would have gladly treasured up in his memory any unguarded expression which had escaped from his lips in the moments of privacy, dared to breathe against his master an imputation which would have been so much at variance with the uniform prudence of his behaviour. Against the possibility of such an allegation our Lord protected himself by the openness and boldness with which he taught, not avoiding the tables of his enemies, generally choosing opportunities when the greatest crowds might profit by his ministrations, and never willingly affecting secrecy and concealment. Hence, when the High Priest asked Jesus of his disciples and of his doctrine, he confidently appealed to the notoriety of the matter of his teaching, and to the number of his Jewish hearers. *I spoke openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple whither the*

*Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing*⁸.

Nor was the obligation to secrecy which he imposed on the cleansed leper⁹, and in some other instances, an exception to this conduct. On the contrary, the injunction, as Dr. Hales has well observed, was founded in consummate prudence. ‘For the purposes of his divine mission it was necessary that he should perform many miracles to command attention, and hold many discourses to instruct the multitude, and discipline or train his disciples for their future functions. Hence, in the beginning of his ministry especially, he was obliged to keep himself as private as its nature would admit, in order to avoid giving umbrage to the ruling powers by a premature celebrity¹.’

II. We are told by St. John, that ‘Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples².’ There

⁸ John, xviii. 19, 20.

⁹ Matt. viii. 4. ix. 30. xii. 16, &c.

¹ See also Mant’s Bible. Notes at Matt. viii. 4, and Mark, i. 44.

² John, iv. 2.

must have been some particular reason for his abstaining from the celebration of a rite to which he submitted in his own person, and for which he himself prescribed an express form of words. This reason may be found with great seeming probability in the dictates of that wise prudence which Christ possessed so abundantly. Had he acted otherwise, prejudices might have arisen which it would have been difficult to obviate. The converts might have considered the agent by whom the rite was conveyed, rather than the rite itself. Distinctions would have been likely to be taken between those whom Christ had admitted himself, and those whom his apostles and ministers baptized afterwards. Some superior degree of perfection would perhaps have been attributed to one class, and doubts might have been insinuated respecting the satisfactory initiation of the other. Something of this kind seems actually to have occurred at Corinth; when jealousies arose among the followers of the several teachers, in consequence of which Paul declared his joy that he

could recollect but a few whom he had himself baptized in person ³.

III. Our Lord's prudence was very conspicuous in another particular. As a preacher of righteousness to a corrupt generation, faithfulness in his ministry would expose him to give great offence to those who could not bear to have their faults openly represented without extenuation. If there was any mode by which this obstacle to his usefulness could be lessened or removed, it would be of obvious advantage to adopt it; or if he could engage on his side any authority to which his hearers would defer from habitual reverence, a great point would be gained towards their conviction.

This mode was discovered, in some degree, through the medium of the Jewish Scriptures. Christ used the weapons of their own armoury against themselves, and often instructed or re-proved them out of their own law. When he

³ 1 Cor. i. 14—16.

urged any obnoxious topic likely to experience a more than ordinary share of opposition, he expressed himself sometimes in the very words of, sometimes with reference to, a metaphor employed by one of the prophets. Thus when he declared that the victims of divine justice would be 'salted with fire,' and thus preserved for everlasting punishment throughout eternity, there is an allusion to the manner in which the burnt offerings under the Mosaic law were ordered to be prepared for the altar⁴. Hence the Jews were indirectly reminded of the typical meaning of their own sacrifices, and led to acquiesce in its concealed analogy with the divine decrees respecting sinners. So too when the Pharisees objected to his eating with publicans and sinners, he answered them with the text of Hosea, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice'⁵. On the disciples being charged with transgressing the traditions of the elders, he defended them by proving that by those very traditions which they valued so highly, they had made the

⁴ Mark, ix. 49, 50, compared with Lev. ii. 13.

⁵ Matt. ix. 13, compared with Hos. vi. 6.

commandment of God of none effect ⁶. Again ; when accused of violating the sabbath by healing an impotent man, he vindicated himself by reminding the Jews that *they* had no scruple to circumcise their children on that day, if it happened to be the eighth from the birth. And in his occasional reasoning from allowed premises he adopted in effect a similar principle. '*Ye call me Master, and Lord ; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet*' ⁷.

⁶ Matt. xv. 2—6, compared with Exod. xx. 12, and xxi. 17.

⁷ John, xiii. 13. The word translated 'master,' should rather be 'the teacher'—ὁ διδάσκαλος. The emphatic article is added to both the substantives—ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος—shewing that the titles are applied to our Lord in a peculiarly energetic and significant sense. The names of respect given to Christ in the Gospels with reference to his character of teacher are three: 1. '*Rabbi*'—the highest title applied to the preceptors in the Jewish schools, to which the most apposite term in the Greek language is διδάσκαλος, and so it is interpreted by St. John, for the use of his Greek readers (John, i. 38.) 2. '*Rabboni*'—which is the Syriac rabban, a word seemingly used to denote rabbi of eminence, 'with the addition of the affix of the first person, and accommodated to the pronunciation of Judea.' (See Campbell on the Gospels, vol. i. p. 437.) It is twice applied to our Lord, Mark, x. 51. John, xx. 16. 3. '*διδάσκαλος*'—John, xiii. 13, &c. &c.

Nearly allied to our Lord's method on these occasions, was the manner in which he repelled the temptations of Satan. He accepted the challenge, and foiled him at his own weapons. Satan founded his arguments on passages of Scripture distorted and misapplied. Christ combated them by quoting in reply texts which were really applicable to his situation and character. Thus *being ready always to give an answer to every man*, his reproofs were attended with less offence, and their effect was strengthened by the sanction of an authority which his opponents on their own principles were bound to respect.

IV. This subject will receive further illustration from the care with which Christ declined exposing himself to unnecessary risk.

Prudence as often consists in preventing danger by a previous arrangement, as in knowing how to meet it when it becomes unavoidable. The prejudices of the disciples in favour of our Lord's temporal sovereignty, and their

ambitious views, would have led them to co-operate gladly with any movement of the people which had for its object to make him a king. When, therefore, such a feeling manifested itself after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Christ obliged the twelve to depart immediately without him, lest they should be tempted to concur in the design which was apparently forming. *Straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitude away*¹.

Again; though ready and willing to lay down his life for sinners at the appointed season, yet he would on no account precipitate his hour before all was 'finished,' and, therefore, withdrew himself privately from the parts where the malice of his enemies would be most likely to prevail against him. When they sought to take him at Jerusalem, 'he escaped out of their hand' by an exertion of miraculous power². Yet not

¹ Matt. xiv. 22, compared with John, vi. 16.

² John, x. 39. See also Matt. xii. 14.

long after we find him proposing to his disciples to go into Judea again, that he might awaken Lazarus out of sleep within less than two miles of Jerusalem itself.

So too when his time was 'fully come,' his face was steadfastly set towards Jerusalem : whereas, before, he 'abode still in Galilee,' and would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him¹. Sending forward, therefore, his disciples to the passover, he declined accompanying them openly, lest he should attract premature attention. A spirit of ostentation would have dictated a different policy. His voice would have been heard in the streets—he would have sought the assistance of a party, or have challenged the death of a martyr. But after having eluded observation as long as he thought necessary, 'about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught' publicly². Had he wished to save his life, he could not have adopted a more prudent measure for his

¹ John, vii. 1, 9.

² John, vii. 14.

purpose; though, at the same time, while the danger was still impending, he did not shrink from the open exercise of his functions when his Father's business required it. When, therefore, his temporary object was fulfilled, he ceased at once to provide for his safety according to his usual custom, and thus manifested to the world that a desire to escape from personal violence had suggested no part of his previous conduct. *None of those things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy*³.

The same reason which prevailed with our Lord to prevent his incurring unnecessary danger, would equally induce him to avoid whatever would give unnecessary offence.

As the tribute money collected for the use of the temple was designed for the service of God, the Son of God would have been duly exempted from the usual payment by an argument

³ Acts, xx. 24.

drawn from the practice of earthly sovereigns. 'Notwithstanding,' said he, 'lest we should offend them thou shalt find a piece of money; that take and give unto them for thee and me⁴.'

In the case of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, so silently and unostentatiously was the cure performed, that he who was healed knew not the name of his benefactor, 'for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place⁵.'

The lepers whom our Lord cleansed were dismissed with an injunction to comply with the observances of the ritual law, without mentioning from whom they had received the benefit, lest they should increase the jealousy existing against him by spreading his fame⁶.

The whole of this systematic attention to the dictates of human policy shows that Christ did

⁴ Matt. xvii. 24—27.

⁵ John, v. 13.

⁶ Matt. viii. 4. Luke, v. 15, 16.

not usually employ the divine power with which he was endowed so as to render himself independent of the precautions which prudence suggested. He preferred on all practical occasions the use of ordinary means to the working of a miracle in his own behalf, that he might leave behind him a pattern of those human virtues which are within the reach and imitation of mankind in general.

V. It is a mark of no ordinary judgement to know when to reprove, and when to be silent—where forbearance should end, and restraint should begin. It often happens, that zeal in this respect hurries men into rashness, or that caution degenerates into timidity or indifference. Our Lord stands as a beacon between both extremes; equally removed from intemperate warmth on the one hand, and from supineness on the other.

It will not be denied, that the corrupt state of the Jewish world at the advent of Christ, required great faithfulness in pointing out, and

great firmness in correcting abuses. The picture which St. Paul has drawn of the immorality of his countrymen affords an humiliating view of the licentiousness of human nature, when not under the restraint of the purifying principles of the Gospel. To remedy these evils was of course an important part of the object of our Saviour's mission, and his mode of proceeding deserves notice.

Now it appears, that notwithstanding the general corruption which prevailed, no individual is held up to reprobation by name throughout the discourses recorded in the gospels⁷. The Scribes and Pharisees are rebuked with the greatest severity collectively — the difficulty which the rich, as a body, especially during the infancy of Christianity, would experience in entering the kingdom of heaven, is also mentioned—the cities wherein most of his mighty works

⁷ When Christ tells his disciples to *beware of the leaven of Herod*, he is speaking not of the individual, but of the sect of Herodians. Mark, viii. 15. But the passage ought, perhaps, to be excepted in which our Lord sends a message to the designing tetrarch by the title of *that fox*.

were done are upbraided, because they repented not—but there is a systematic forbearance with regard to particular persons which it is impossible should have been the effect of accident. It is the vice which is named and stigmatized, but rarely the vicious person—it is the sect, and not its component members, which is exposed and held up to shame—it is Capernaum or Nazareth, or Jerusalem, and not their individual citizens singled out and specified,—the generation at large and not a part of it—which is reproached with unbelief, or mourned over on account of its obduracy. Once when his disciples seem to have drawn unfavourable conclusions respecting the religious state of those on whom the tower in Siloam fell, he shewed how averse he was from personality by turning their minds from an uncharitable and fruitless speculation to a moral of immediate practical utility. ‘Except *ye* repent, ye shall all likewise perish.’ Judging, therefore, of the nature of his discourses from the portions of them which the Evangelists have preserved to us, it is certain that nothing which could be construed into a direct or private attack formed any part of them.

There cannot be conceived any thing more likely to promote the ends of his ministry than such a course. It would make the fewest personal enemies, and conciliate most friends. It would leave such as were convicted by their own consciences, at liberty to come out from among their companions and to be separate, without bearing about them the taint of any reproach attached exclusively to their own individual character. They would have to surmount no private feelings or prejudices, because they had undergone no public disgrace, and had experienced no reproofs but those which they had shared in common with their sect at large.

Now compare this forbearance with the freedom with which Christ singled out objects of praise, and the difference will appear so striking that it cannot have arisen undesignedly. Of the centurion, whose servant he healed, he said, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.' To the woman who touched the hem of his garment, 'Thy faith hath made thee whole.' Of John the Baptist—'among them that are born of

women, there hath not risen a greater.' Of the woman who anointed him—' She hath wrought a good work upon me.' Of one of the Scribes, ' that he was not far from the kingdom of God.' Of the poor widow, that she had ' cast more in than all the others.' Of Nathanael—' Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile ⁸.' It appears, therefore, that our Lord never hesitated to give personal praise, however systematically he refrained from personality in blame.

It does not in the least affect the argument, that so few men of note among the Jews actually availed themselves of the easy terms on which they might have withdrawn from the fellowship of those on whom the woes were pronounced;—that Nicodemus among the rulers, and Joseph of Arimathea among the rich, should be almost the only names whose praise is in the churches as honourable exceptions to the general unbelief persisted in by others of their rank or opinions. Our estimate of the prudence of our Lord's conduct must be taken without refer-

⁸ Matt. viii. 10. ix. 22. xi. 11. xxvi. 10. Mark, xii. 24. 43. John, i. 47.

ence to the success it met with; and the more judicious it proves to have been, the deeper was the guilt, and the greater the condemnation, of those who refused to hear the voice of the charmer, though he charmed never so wisely.

Again; there was an impartiality in Christ's discourses, which must have placed his character for independence on a high footing. He never spared the sin on account of the particular sinner, so that even his adversaries confessed in his favour—'*Thou carest not for any man, neither regardest thou the person of men*'⁹. In the very next chapter it happens that eight several woes are pronounced against the chiefs of the Pharisees. But though thus bold in reproof when the essential interests of religion were at stake, his general custom was to take no notice of men or their opinions, unless they interfered with Christianity. He left the dead to bury their dead. He intermeddled with no unimportant matters, and suffered the men of the

⁹ Matt. xxii. 17.

world to manage the things of this world according to the light of their own judgement in temporal affairs, without stepping out of his own proper province to legislate or decide in things indifferent.

This accounts for his silence on many subjects where his authority would have been gladly quoted; and it affords, at the same time, an useful opportunity for Christians to try their acquaintance with the spirit of religion by comparing particular cases with the comprehensive precepts of the Gospel. Our Lord gave no opinion on several points of the highest interest to a Christian community—he said nothing concerning slavery—nothing concerning political subjection to the Romans—nothing concerning the comparative expediency of particular forms of government, of particular professions, of particular modes of education—but he left it to the sagacity of his followers to collect from the general tenor of his doctrine, that it was the duty of every man to abide in the same calling

wherein he was called¹; and that the new dispensation was intended to be applicable to the world at large, and not for an exclusive community of ascetics, whose principles would require them to hold no intercourse with the rest of mankind.

VI. But Christ had not merely to contend with the *natural* difficulties incidental to his ministry as the prophet of a new covenant. The Evangelists mention, that on several occasions questions were proposed with the express intention of leading him to commit himself by the delivery of some opinions which should offend one or other of the contending parties.

St. Matthew tells us, that the Pharisees and Herodians, after consulting together how they might entangle him in his talk, referred to his arbitration the controversy respecting the right of paying tribute to Cæsar. Our Lord, taking their own admissions as the basis of his answer,

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 20.

neither gave them an opportunity of representing him to the people as an enemy of the Mosaic law and their liberties, nor to the Roman governor as the instigator of opposition to his authority. Nor was this all. He not only avoided the snare laid for him, but, on the one hand, condemned the worldly policy of the Herodians, who to please the ruling power were disposed to make religion subservient to their interest; and on the other afforded no sanction to the rebellious spirit of the Pharisees, who under the pretence of conscientious scruples affected to deny the lawfulness of acknowledging the Roman government².

The Sadducees met with no better success in a subsequent attempt on the same day. With a view of cavilling at the doctrine of the resurrection, they inquired whose wife a woman should be in the future state, who had been married successively to seven brothers. Christ contented himself with mildly rebuking their curi-

² Matt. xxii. 15—22.

osity, by pointing out that the supposed difficulty proved, not the absurdity of the doctrine itself, but the want of spiritual understanding on the part of those who misconceived its nature. *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God*³.

It remained for our Lord to silence the Pharisees, and it seems that an opportunity occurred within a few hours of the former unsuccessful trials. Their learned men disputed *which was the great commandment of the law*. Some contended for the laws respecting phylacteries—others for those which regarded circumcision—others for those which regarded sacrifices. With this difference of opinions they came to Christ, desiring to know his thoughts on the subject. Lightfoot remarks the judicious management of our Lord in avoiding offence by giving a reply which, while it magnified the moral law, would seem to do honour to one of their favourite Levitical institutions. ‘He suits an answer to him

³ Matt. xxii. 23—32.

from that very passage, which was the first in the writing of the phylacteries—"Hear, O Israel"—he directs the eyes and minds of those who repeated them to the sense and the marrow of the thing repeated; and that they rest not in the bare work of repeating them⁴. The Evangelists, who generally give a simple record of facts, leaving others to draw their own inferences, in this instance notice the effect produced by our Lord's reply. '*No man after that durst ask him any questions*⁵.'

The Samaritan woman, when talking with Christ, whom she 'perceived to be a prophet,' thought it a favourable opportunity to settle the controversy existing between her own nation and the Jews, as to the proper place of worship. The question appears to have been proposed in sincerity and without any bad design; but our Saviour, evading any decision which might afford a subsequent triumph to either party, passed at once to the explanation of truths of a more per-

⁴ Works, vol. xi. 419.

⁵ Mark, xii. 34. See also Matt. xxii. 46.

sonal and pressing interest. "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him ⁶."

The conduct of Christ at another time has been well called a beautiful model of the meekness of wisdom. The chief priests, intending to assert their privilege in matters relating to religion, asked him from what source he derived his authority to teach. Jesus might have appealed, as on other occasions, to his miracles—to the voice from heaven acknowledging him as the beloved Son of God—to the witness of John—to the testimony of the prophets, compared with what they had personally seen and heard of his character. But he rather chose to offer in return another question to them, which if they undertook to reply to it, would condemn

⁶ John, iv. 21, 23.

them out of their own mouths, or if they confessed their incompetence to answer, would absolve him also from the necessity of satisfying their previous inquiry⁷.

Had the prudence which our Lord manifested on all these trying occasions, been displayed on only one of them, it would have pointed him out as an extraordinary character; but when we see it never forsaking him, governing with perfect consistency every word and action, we can arrive at no other conclusion than that to which the Scriptures lead us—*‘Never man spake like this man. Truly this was the Son of God.’* The same truth remains impressed on the mind, whether we survey him teaching, as in his parables, by implication rather than by direct address,—avoiding unnecessary decisions, as in the case of the inheritance to be divided, and of the woman taken in adultery—appealing to the practice of his opponents, as in the question whether it was lawful to heal

⁷ Matt. xxi. 23—27.

on the sabbath-day—appealing to their own Scriptures, as in the case of the question respecting divorce—appealing to their own understandings, as in the case of their asking a sign from heaven—appealing to the private means of knowledge within the reach of the inquirer, as in the case of the lawyer who was referred to the law which he professed to study and explain, for information respecting eternal life⁸. Throughout the whole the wisdom of Solomon's remark stands unquestionably exemplified—*'A fool uttereth all his mind, but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards'*⁹.

Experience, however, shows that it is more easy to acknowledge the excellence of a model, than to transfer the spirit of it to a copy.

1. Those, for instance, seem to have mistaken the example of Christ, who take his zeal for their pattern, but overlook the prudence

⁸ Luke, xii. 14. John, viii. 1. Matt. xii. 10—12. xix. 3. xvi. 1—4. Luke, x. 25—37.

⁹ Prov. xxix. 11.

with which he kept it within the limits of propriety. It is sometimes thought that a deep interest in the eternal welfare of others will warrant any measure that may conduce to their safety; though, generally speaking, to insure any measure of success, the caution with which they are approached should be proportioned to the strength of the prejudices to be removed. There is a certain degree of captiousness always attendant on error, which if it be not tenderly dealt with, will perhaps prove the most effectual obstacle to the work of improvement. That apostolical rule was founded on an intimate knowledge of the human heart, which calls on the Corinthian converts to 'give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God : even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved '.

Yet it is impossible not to observe, that an inclination sometimes exists to give a deliberate

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31, 32.

shock to opinions deemed erroneous, in a manner quite as uncalled for by fidelity to the doctrines of the Gospel, as it is inconsistent with Christian charity, and the practice of our Redeemer. Fidelity to the doctrines of the Gospel requires us to use the language of encouraging love, as much as the language of alarm and warning. Christian charity seems to demand, not indeed a dangerous indulgence to the mote in a brother's eye, but such a measure of prudence and tenderness in removing it as shall not close it for ever against the true light. The practice of our Redeemer seems to enjoin such gentle dealing with those who may not be far from the kingdom of heaven, as may eventually win them to the truth, and save by a conciliatory appeal what would have been lost by precipitation and heat.

Nor can it be looked upon as a favourable symptom of the present times, that it has become the fashion to decry conciliation, and to stigmatize it as a mark of want of firmness, or of a temporizing spirit. In the opinion of some,

to conciliate a Roman Catholic, or a Dissenter, is to give up the principles of the Reformation, or to be indifferent to the unity and fellowship of the established church. But to win the affections of a conscientious opponent, is one step towards convincing his judgment; and if we meet him on neutral ground as far as we safely may, there is a better chance of finally persuading him to pass the line of separation, and take sweet counsel with us in the house of God as a friend. There was certainly a great difference in the degree of severity with which our Lord rebuked different degrees of guilt. Even all the Pharisees were not treated alike. Simon, who invited Christ to his table, seems to have been partially impressed with a proper sense of his character, though he had very defective views of his prophetic office. Our Lord, accordingly, in vindicating the conduct of the woman who anointed him, appears to allow, by implication at least, that though she had loved *much*, Simon also had loved *a little*. He thus convinces without affronting him². It must needs be that

² Luke, vii. 47.

offences come, but it is because they are inevitable, that their number should be lessened as far as is practicable. The question is, not whether much that is desirable can be effected at once, but whether, with less risk, a greater share of eventual good may not be obtained, by not discarding from our ministry the wisdom of the serpent. For it has not unfrequently happened that under the pretext of declaring all the counsel of God, and keeping back nothing that can be profitable, a disgust has been excited, the effect of which has proved a bar to all future usefulness.

I am aware that it is much easier to carp at the failings of good men, than to imitate their virtues. The name of Martyn can never be mentioned, except with respect, by all who value earnest piety and self-denying devotion. If, therefore, I have selected a passage of his life, in which that eminent servant of God seems to have forgotten that Jesus, whom he preached, taught as his hearers were able to bear the word, it is because his prudence was afterwards so re-

markable in the conduct of his missionary labours, that an instance of inattention to its dictates becomes doubly dangerous when it is found in a man of more than common judgement and discretion. It is also an useful lesson to observe how the best among the sons of men can sustain no comparison with Christ, either in the consistency of their whole character, or in the excellence of its particular features.

“ *** coming in, said many had become more hostile than ever ; they should come up to prayers, because they thought I was sincere ; but not to the sermon, as they thought I did nothing but preach about hell : I hope this portends good.’ Sept. 21. *I seemed uneasy at the thoughts of calling forth the hatred of people to-morrow by preaching to them unpleasant truths.* Sept. 22. Sunday. Was more tried by the fear of man, than I ever have been since God has called me to the ministry. The threats and opposition of these men made me unwilling to set before them the truths which they hated : *yet I had no species of hesitation about doing it.*

They had let me know that if I would preach a sermon like one of Blair's, they should be glad to hear it; but they would not attend if so much of hell was preached. This morning again, Capt. *** said, 'Mr. Martyn must not damn us to-day, or none will come again.' I was a little disturbed, but Luke, x. and, above all, our Lord's last address to his disciples, John, xiv. 16, strengthened me. I took for my text, Psalm ix. 17, *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.* The officers were all behind my back, in order to have an opportunity of retiring in case of dislike. B*** attended the whole time. H***, *as soon as he heard the text, went back, and said he would hear no more about hell; so he employed himself in feeding the geese; *** said I had shut him up in hell, and the universal cry was, 'we are all to be damned'*³."

A few pages farther on, his biographer notices the consequences of this mode of preach-

³ Life of Martyn, pp. 130, 131.

ing. “ *The violent and increasing opposition he experienced from many of the more intelligent part of the passengers, and the discouraging inattention he too often perceived among the other class of his hearers, caused him to grieve on their account, and to humble himself before God. ‘I go down,’ he says, ‘and stand in the midst of a few, without their taking the smallest notice of me; Lord, it is for thy sake I suffer such slights—let me persevere notwithstanding.’ But though he mourned on their account, he was contented to be left without fruit, if such were the will of God. Conscious of having delivered the message faithfully, and trusting that with respect to both descriptions of auditors, he had commended himself to their consciences, if he had not reached their hearts, his own peace of mind was not affected, &c. &c.*”—“ The Sunday after this, presuming it would be the last, Mr. Martyn addressed the ship’s company in a farewell discourse. The occasion, it might have been conceived, was such as to preclude any disposition to ridicule, even with men pre-eminently disposed to scoffing and contempt. *But*

*those who had reviled him at first, continued to revile him to the very last*⁴."

The same ill success attended his preaching at the New Church at Calcutta. His first discourse caused a great ferment, and was exceedingly offensive to many of his hearers. The consequence was, that a season of great irritation ensued, very warm personal attacks were directed against him, and another chaplain, one of Martyn's friends, found it expedient to adopt the plan of simply reading the Homilies to the congregation, in order to avoid the spirit of disputation and controversy which began to prevail universally.

It is not improbable that his opponents in the ship would have been equally unmoved, had he addressed them in a different manner. But the experiment should have been tried. The truth should have been spoken in love, and a way gradually opened for the introduction of

⁴ Life, pp. 169, 174.

topics which could not be heard with candour, or received with advantage by minds in a state of violent irritation against them.

2. The example of Christ seems to teach, that as every religious topic is not always opportune, and every time not the proper season of reproof, so every offender is not the proper subject of it. 'Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.' 'He that reproveth a scorner, getteth to himself shame, and he that rebuketh a wicked man, getteth himself a blot^s.'

Directions of this kind seem to refer principally to those who are notorious for profaneness or unbelief. The conduct of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch will show the sense in which the Apostles understood them. When they saw that the Jews were filled with envy, and spoke against their doctrine, 'contradicting and blaspheming,' they gave no farther excite-

^s Prov. ix. 7. xxiii. 9.

ment at that time to their bad passions, but shook off the dust of their feet against them, and departed to another place⁶. It seems that in such cases the ministers of Christ are to take as their rule the saying of their master respecting some of the Pharisees whom he had offended—'Let them alone'.—Silence and separation are the most becoming, and perhaps not the least effective weapons, with which such offenders can be assailed.

It may perhaps be asked, how the uncompromising character of John the Baptist's ministry agrees with this view of what prudence seems to require from the Christian teacher. The severity and openness with which he reprobated the Pharisees, Matt. iii. 7, who flocked with seeming readiness to his doctrine, may appear to be at variance with the spirit of our Lord's instructions to his disciples, and his personal example. The terms, however, of John's address were very suitable to one who spoke

⁶ Acts, xiii. 45—51.

⁷ Matt. xv. 14.

with the authority and penetration of a prophet⁸, but should be imitated with caution by those who bear an inferior commission. His language served to teach this important lesson—that when the profession of piety is common, it is incumbent on ministers to be careful how they sanction or promote the advances of hypocrites. At the same time it is peculiarly necessary to pray to the ‘Father of lights,’ for discernment of spirits⁹, lest one who is not far from the kingdom of heaven should be discouraged, or a little one offended.

3. It is clearly our duty not to tempt God by acting as if we presumed on his interference in our behalf, by miraculous protection, when the use of ordinary means would be sufficient to extricate us from danger.

Dr. Clagett says on John, vii.—It seems probable from ver. 1, 7, 11, that the Jews had formed some treacherous design against him.

⁸ See Is. i. 10, and Matt. xxiii. 33.

⁹ James, i. 17.

Thus, though our Lord determined to go to the feast, in obedience to the divine command, yet he went privately to avoid the danger, showing in this manner that he would not use a miraculous power to escape the designs of his enemies, when human prudence would serve.

The Evangelists have recorded only three instances of our Lord's preserving himself from violence by miracle, and in each of these, a sudden irritation seems to have been excited against him, which, to a common observer, previous appearances gave little reason to expect. It was immediately after the people of Nazareth had borne witness to him in their synagogue, and '*all had wondered,*' as St. Luke expressly marks, 'at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,' that, on our Lord's asserting his right to work miracles where he pleased, a tumult arose in which the whole assembly participated who had just united in admiring and applauding him. '*All* they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up,

and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down head-long.' Then it was that in such an imminent danger, which no human precaution could have averted, he gave them as it were a practical rebuke for their presumption in requiring him to show amongst them the signs which he had wrought at Capernaum, by miraculously withdrawing himself from their hands. 'He, passing through the midst of them, went his way¹.'

Two other occurrences of the same kind are recorded by St. John. One of them, like the last mentioned, took place in the temple, to the holiness of which it might have been thought respect would have been paid,—and at a peculiarly solemn festival,—the day after the conclusion of the feast of tabernacles. It happened also, as in the other instance, that an unusual success had apparently attended the first part of his discourse, for the Evangelist calls attention

¹ Luke, iv. 28—30.

to the fact, that 'as he spake these words, many believed on him.' But no sooner did he proceed to assert the priority of his existence to Abraham, than, under pretence that he blasphemed, the Jews broke out into open violence and attempted to stone him, 'but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by².'

The other instance was under circumstances precisely similar—in the temple at Jerusalem, and at the feast of the dedication. But notwithstanding the sanctity of the place, and the motive which had brought them together, the Jews 'sought again to take him, but he escaped out of their hand,' and avoided giving further offence by withdrawing to a distance, beyond Jordan. It would seem also, by the expression used by St. John, as if it were more than a temporary retirement of a few days, for, says the Evangelist, 'there he abode³.'

² John, viii, 30—59.

³ John, x. 39, 40.

None of these cases, therefore, afford any precedent for an unwarranted dependence on the interposition of Providence, out of the natural order of things. The answer of Christ to Satan is in point. *It is written—Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

4. A few words remain to be said on another subject on which more difference of opinion may be supposed to exist. No question occurs more frequently, as a case of conscience, than the degree of separation from the world which religion requires from her servants.

Our Lord's example is often quoted to prove that he was no advocate for an ascetic retirement from the pleasures of life, and that the cheerfulness of his general temper was at utter variance with unsocial habits. These are truths which are admitted by all parties—the real difficulty lies in drawing the line of distinction for individual guidance, and in determining the point at which it becomes the duty of the Christian to contend against the stream of custom.

The question seems to be too often treated as one of mere expediency and calculation. The case is argued with regard to the *quantum* of individual danger, and not on the broad and universal grounds of principle. How often can general society be enjoyed, without bringing into peril Christian moderation? How much can be withdrawn from religious study, from private occupation, from domestic obligations, and given to the world, without surrendering the heart and affections to the same master? How long can we act in union with the great mass of mankind, without lessening spirituality of mind, or injuring tenderness of conscience? But these are low considerations which betray that God is served by such reasoners from a cold principle of duty, of which love does not form an essential constituent,—that a less strict service would be more congenial to our feelings, if within the pale of safety—and that the least measure of obedience compatible with salvation would be gladly adopted. They are also selfish considerations, for they leave entirely out of view a very important part

of the question—the harm such concessions are likely to do to others, by lowering the standard of practice in the minds of those who are already predisposed to depreciate it.

On the other hand, to mix with none but such as coincide in the same views of religion, and pursue their object by the same steps, is neither to act charitably by those whom we presume to be in error, nor in conformity to the analogy of God's dealings with mankind. Connection with the world is a part of the trial of man, during his state of probation. Were it intended to be otherwise, the tares would be rooted out whenever they appear, instead of being suffered to grow together with the wheat until the harvest. Indeed St. Paul seems incidentally to decide the matter, where he gives directions to the Corinthians respecting another case of conscience which had occurred. He writes—*'If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto*

you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake⁴. . . . Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the others.' Here is a possible occurrence supposed, of more questionable propriety than any which is likely to take place in a professedly Christian country. The faith of the new disciple, perhaps scarcely grounded in the elements of the religion which he had recently embraced, would be liable to be shaken by the sneers of the heathen philosopher, or the reproaches of his former associate in the temple, the unconverted Jew. Yet St. Paul does not make it a point of duty with the primitive believer to decline all intercourse with a person of different opinions, though that person were a Pagan, or, what in the infancy of Christianity would have been still more dangerous, an adherent of Judaism ; he only lays down certain rules for the prudent governance of his conduct in a situation requiring the exercise of peculiar delicacy and discretion. He provides for behaviour consistent with his religious profession, in case he feels *disposed to go*.

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 27, 28, 29.

But it is objected, that those who enter into what is called general society, are seldom influential men. If it be meant, that their influence is lessened with a certain portion of the religious world, the fact, if true, must be deplored as another instance of that narrowness of judgement which conscientious persons sometimes betray. But the influence which is thus lost in one quarter, where perhaps it is not wanted, is more than compensated in another, where its weight will be felt most beneficially. Let any one look into the circle of his acquaintance, and determine which of his religious friends is most useful in promoting the cause of Christ—the man who withdraws himself into his narrow and monotonous circle, guarded jealously from intruders of a different *caste*, and stepping out rarely and reluctantly into scenes where he may chance to encounter uncongenial sentiments;—or he who moves freely, yet circumspectly, cheerfully, yet with soberness and decorum—enjoying, without abuse, the legitimate blessings of this life, but without suffering them to steal on his affections or engross

too great a share of his thoughts—not ashamed to confess his hope and calling, but letting his moderation be known unto all men—the light of an extended sphere, and the standard round which the timid or the undecided may rally—restraining the bad, by the respect which consistent Christian behaviour always commands⁵—persuading the doubtful, by the silent force of example—strengthening the good by holding out the right hand of fellowship wherever the interests of piety or charity stand in need of his concurrence.

If, therefore, there is a difficulty in establishing any general rule applicable to the point at issue, there are some particulars connected with it which the laws of Christian prudence seem absolutely to require. It is quite certain that any thing enjoyed to excess, or, what is the same thing, which leaves the mind in a state of dissipation whence it cannot be

⁵ ——— pictate gravem ac meritis si forte virum quem
Aspexere, silent, arrectisque auribus astant;
Ille regit dictis animos, et peccata mulcet.—Æn. i. 155.

recalled to that composure necessary for serious thought, partakes of the nature of crime. Christianity has won its way without making any sacrifice to the weakness of men in this respect. It is so far from flattering the selfish feelings of human nature, that it characterizes as wordly those who will not forego the gratifications of the senses, and expressly disclaims them as children of God. *'The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world'*⁶.

And the reason of this is evident. If every thing were very good, as it was when the Creator first beheld and blessed the world, every object around would remind man of God, and promote the beginning of a spiritual intercourse with him which would be continued 'face to face' hereafter, on closer terms of intimacy. All his pleasures would be pure, all his enjoyments innocent, all his desires moderate and cautious and regulated by a predominant feel-

⁶ 1 John, ii. 16.

ing of love and obedience to his Maker—every external object from which the mind could receive impressions would exercise his gratitude, and furnish him with suitable thoughts of Him who ‘crowneth the year with his goodness, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.’ The world would be on the side of God, and acquaintance with it would not lessen that relish for heavenly things, which, as it forms the principal enjoyment of glorified spirits in heaven, must be acquired in some measure on earth, to make us meet for eternity.

But it is vain to speculate on what might have been the case, had the world continued to the descendant of Adam, ~~that~~ garden of Eden in which the first created being was stationed. The contrast which the actual state of things presents leads to this practical conclusion—that, on the one hand, no countenance is afforded by our Saviour’s example for separating Christians from the great body of mankind as an insulated sect. The prayer of our Lord for his followers was, that they should be filled

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with grace to withstand temptation, not that they should be abstracted from a state of trial. '*I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil*'.⁷ On the other hand, they are as clearly warned, that '*they must come out of the world, and not be conformed to it*'—that the *friendship of the world is enmity with God*—and that '*what is born of God overcometh the world*'.⁸ With these texts before him, he would be presumptuous who adventured into the scenes of mixed life, as into a friendly country, where every thing was to be enjoyed without restraint or caution.

⁷ John, xvii. 15.

⁸ Rom. xii. 2. James, iv. 4. 1 John, v. 4.

CHAPTER IX.

The individual Application of Christ's Preaching.

ALTHOUGH the Jewish law consisted almost entirely of detached and definite precepts, there was yet nothing in the spirit of it which approached to what may be called individual application. All its ordinances were general and abstract. With the exception of the laws respecting the Levites, which were appointed for them exclusively as forming a distinct and hereditary priesthood, the statutes of the covenant are always addressed collectively to the whole congregation of Israel.

Nor could it have been otherwise under the simple form of society which that people presented. Men who were alternately shepherds or soldiers, as the exigencies of the moment required, were little acquainted with that artificial division of labour which the increased wants of

more civilized and luxurious ages render necessary, and therefore in proportion as they had fewer relative duties to perform, they stood in need of fewer specific and individual charges. Till the preaching of John the Baptist¹, we do not find any separate class of men inquiring respecting their own particular duties; and nothing indicates that their probable ignorance of *what they should do*, had attracted the attention of their teachers.

The same deficiency of individual application is perceptible in all that is left to us of the heathen moralists. There is a perpetual attempt to define and describe abstract virtues, distinguishing them from their opposite vices, and laying down certain limits

Quos ultra citraque nefas consistere rectum.

But we find nothing addressed to the consciences of characters in particular stations, nothing which steps out of the broad line of ge-

¹ See Luke, iii. 10—14.

neralities, and constrains the reader to enter upon a course of self-examination, and bring home to his own heart those parts of a system of morals which bear upon his own case with more than common urgency. Among all the remains of antiquity there is not a single essay which attempts to give any thing like a treatise on the duties of men. Nor can an exception be made even in favour of that book, in which, from its professed object, we should most expect to meet with such a specification of the requirements of any given situation. There are, it is true, certain cases of conscience which are solved, as in the instance of the Alexandrian merchant, and of the pretended fishery²; but, generally speaking, Cicero aims at nothing more than a dry and vague exposition of abstract truths, which are rather calculated to form the basis of a legal code, than to alarm the conscience and inform the judgement of individual inquirers. The moralist seems to avoid committing himself, and never digresses into

² Cic. de Off. lib. iii. 12 and 14.

the character of one who advises with a view to definite duties, or to a particular combination of circumstances.

It is in the pages of the satirists alone that anything exists which approaches to personal address. They did not hesitate to apply very closely general rules to specific persons; and consequently, their pen was more felt and caused a greater sensation than the elaborate moral disquisitions of their rivals the philosophers. Juvenal asks, after some general reflections on the nature of true nobility,

His ego quem monui—?

as if aware that no one ever applies to himself what may relate to all. He then singles out the character whom he had in view, and addresses him specially by name with a precision which could not fail of effect.

——— Tecum est mihi sermo, Rubelli
Blande³.

³ Juv. viii 39.

The practice of Christ in this respect differed essentially from both the Jewish and Pagan teachers. The plain literalities of his precepts were such, that no class of persons could complain that they had been overlooked in the general system; and the exigencies of each case were provided for as carefully as if it were the sole and exclusive object of his legislation. It had been foretold by Isaiah that such should be the nature of his ministry. *'The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek,—he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn'*⁴.

According to the terms of this prophecy, close application was a requisite qualification of the preaching of the Messiah. It was foretold that he should suit his language to the wants

⁴ Is. lxi. 1, 2.

of the world at his coming. In fulfilment of this assurance, the good tidings which he announced to the *meek* were, that they were *blessed, and should inherit the earth*⁵. The *broken-hearted* would require comfort, and Christ took away their heaviness, by declaring that there was joy in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth⁶. The *captives* would sigh after freedom from sin. Christ told them that *the truth should make them free*, and that *if the Son made them free, then were they free indeed*⁷. Those who *sat in darkness* would stand in need of light. Christ came as light into the world, that *whosoever believeth on him should not abide in darkness*⁸. Those who were *dead in trespasses and sin* would require to be quickened again into life, and to be reanimated with a fresh spirit, enabling them to perform the functions of their new state of being. And, accordingly, Christ who is our life appeared, that *believers might have life through his name*⁹.

⁵ Matt. v. 5.

⁶ Luke, xv. 10.

⁷ John, viii. 32, 36.

⁸ John, xii. 46.

⁹ John, xx. 31.

Here then was the teacher whom the world wanted—bearing a message from God to each, portioning out distinct specifications of duty, and leaving all without excuse for rejecting the application to their own cases, while they readily adapted it to that of others. ‘He always had in view the posture of mind of the persons whom he addressed. He did not entertain the Pharisees with invectives against the open impiety of their Sadducee rivals; nor, on the other hand, did he sooth the Sadducee’s ear with descriptions of Pharisaical pomp and folly. In the presence of the Pharisees he preached against hypocrisy: to the Sadducees he proved the resurrection of the dead. In like manner, of that known enmity which subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, this faithful teacher took no undue advantage, to make friends or proselytes of either. Upon the Jews he inculcated a more comprehensive benevolence. With the Samaritan he defended the orthodoxy of the Jewish creed.’

† Paley’s Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Carlisle, 1790.

Hear the language in which he reproved the besetting sins of the Pharisees. 'Ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. They be blind leaders of the blind. They say and do not. They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. All their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. Ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves. Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith. Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extor-

tion and excess. Ye justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts².'

Hear his language to the Sadducees. 'Do ye not, therefore, err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God. As touching the dead, that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; ye, therefore, do greatly err³.'

To the Herodians—'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's⁴.'

To the Jews as a nation—'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often

² Matt. xv. 3, 7, 14. xvi. 6. xxiii. 3—7, 13—15, 23, 25. Luke, xvi. 15.

³ Mark, xii. 24, 26, 27.

⁴ Matt. xxii. 21.

would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate ⁵:'

Respecting the Scribes, in the presence of that Scribe who questioned concerning the first commandment—'Beware of the Scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market places, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts; which devour widow's houses, and for a pretence make long prayers ⁶.'

Addresses of this kind are all intelligible to the conscience, because they are directly aimed at the proper mark. They specify the characteristic faults of every description of hearers. They expose distinctly and with precision what is inconsistent with Christianity in the practice of each, and settle the exact point at which the work of reformation ought to begin, as well as the spirit in which it should be effected.

⁵ Matt. xxiv. 37, 38.

⁶ Mark, xii. 38—40.

The same forcible conviction must have attended our Lord's close application of the word to the consciences of individuals. 'What man is there *of you*, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone. If *ye*, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him. *Which of you* shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?' In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, without entering into generals, he points his discourse at that particular sin of which she was guilty, and the direct charge upon her conscience affects her with an immediate sense of her own wickedness. Twice in the presence of Judas did Christ plainly declare that the intention of his betrayer was known to him. 'Have not I chosen *you twelve*, and *one of you is a devil*?' 'The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him; but woe unto that

⁷ Matt. vii. 9, 11. Luke, xiv. 5. Imitated too by the apostles—'whom *ye* have taken.' Acts, ii. 23. 'Ye have crucified.' 30.

⁸ Διάβολος, false accuser.

man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed Then Judas which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said⁹. So too with regard to the rich man whose foible was worldly mindedness, the penetrating knowledge of our Saviour enabled him to speak at once to the point, and put his character to a decisive test. 'It soon appeared that our Lord knew the young ruler well; talked to his thoughts, as we do to each other's words, and that he was not so zealous to do what Jesus should recommend, as he was forward to inquire like one determined to do something great and extraordinary'.

The effect of these searching addresses to the hearts and thoughts of his hearers is discernible in the discovery of character produced by the ministration of Christ. It was said of him by Simeon, '*This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many*

⁹ John, vi. 71. Matt. xxvi. 24, 25.

¹ Benson's Life of Christ, p. 300.

hearts may be revealed. The prophecy was fulfilled in the offence taken at his doctrine when 'from that time many of his disciples went back, and followed no more with him ².' It was fulfilled also when the unworthy motive of the people was detected who sought him, 'not because they saw the miracles, but because they did eat of the loaves, and were filled ³.'

Nor does it derogate from the real efficacy of Christ's preaching, that so small a part of the Jewish nation yielded to its power, and received the engrafted word with meekness. There is a mental deadness, an incapacity to receive impressions on certain subjects, which is well represented in Scripture by the image of an hard and beaten wayside path, and well exemplified in the obstinacy of Jewish unbelief. Take the Jew of the present day, and he will exhibit the same example of moral insensibility which was evinced by his forefathers under the ministry of Jesus. Place before him in all their minute and

² John, vi. 66.

³ John, vi. 26.

particular details, the circumstantial incidents of the birth and life and death of the child of promise and the man of sorrows, predicted in his own Scriptures. Show him the inconsistencies and contrarieties of character, apparently impossible and irreconcilable, which meet in the person of Jesus, and of him alone,—show him the historical exactness with which the events of his ministry are foretold not in vague and general terms, such as the wisdom of a lying prophet would have selected, but in language often unequivocally, sometimes exclusively referring to Christ⁴. Show him the gradual revelations by which the nature of the Messiah was unfolded, new features being added by each successive prophet, features which could neither be borrowed nor deduced from what had previously been declared, till it was finally announced that the seed of the woman, who forty centuries before had been appointed to bruise the serpent's head, should spring from the line of David in the village of Bethlehem. Take

⁴ See Is. liii. Ps. ii. 7, compared with Acts, xiii. 33. Ps. ii. 12. ex. 1. xvi. 10. Acts, ii. 13.

the very chapter and the line of argument, by which Philip was enabled to convert the Æthiopian eunuch, and which has been blessed to the conviction of an illustrious infidel of our own country⁵,—open and allege to him, as the manner of Paul was in the synagogues, ‘that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead,—testify to him with St. Peter, that ‘to him give all the prophets witness,’—or, after the sanction of still higher authority, like our Lord to the two disciples going to Emmaus, expound to him ‘in all the scriptures the things concerning Christ, beginning at Moses and the prophets⁶.’ He will still maintain that the hope of Israel is not yet come, and amid the fulness of light, and the completion of prophecy, and the concurrence of evidence which has proved satisfactory to the most wise and inquiring among men, he will hold fast to his judicial error, will tread under foot the good seed, will declare in his outcast condition among all the nations of the earth—‘we look for another.’

⁵ See Burnet's Life of Lord Rochester.

⁶ Acts, xvii. 3. x. 43. Luke, xxiv. 27.

But though in such quarters the effect of an earthly ministry, however closely pressed on the conscience, and applied to the particular case, be sometimes not apparent, the practice of our Lord determines the conduct that ought to be pursued. The very hardness of the soil implies a motive for increased exertion, and renewed culture. Why else is Paul to plant, and Apollos to water, and God to give the increase, if it were not that the use of such metaphorical language supposes the existence of latent energies and capabilities of fruitfulness, which labours earnestly directed and attended by the divine blessing, may rouse into activity. Why else have we line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little, except it is that the most impenetrable and unpromising state may find its proper seed time, and its proper measure of productiveness.

It is, therefore, essential to the success of a Christian ministry, that public teaching be followed up, wherever it is practicable, with the private and individual inquiry — *Do ye*

understand these things? In St. Paul's charge to the elders of Ephesus, he twice presses upon their attention how he 'taught from house to house,' and 'ceased not for the space of three years *to warn every one*, night and day, with tears.' And in writing to the Corinthians, he appeals to their knowledge of his personal sympathy with the feelings of every private Christian among them, notwithstanding the multiplicity of his ordinary duties—'Who is weak, and I am not weak—who is offended, and I burn not?'

7 Acts, xx. 20, 31. 2 Cor. xi. 20.

CHAPTER X.

On the Effects of Christ's Ministry.

WHEN our Saviour was asked by one of the multitude—‘ Lord, are there few that be saved ’ —he did not judge it expedient to answer the question otherwise than by advising his follower to make a serious use of the inquiry for the promotion of his own individual salvation. ‘ Strive to enter in at the strait gate,’ he replied, ‘ for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.’

Yet though our Lord was pleased on this occasion to repress the idle curiosity of his hearer, he has not left us altogether without the means of forming some conclusions respecting the awful subject of his inquiry. He has taught us, both plainly and figuratively, that his Father's flock is a little one. The inadequate

effect produced by the Gospel on those to whom it was first preached, compared with the sensation excited by the appearance of its author—the small number of disciples obtained by our Lord during his personal ministry—were presages which have been but too surely fulfilled in all succeeding times, that there are obstacles prevailing in the hearts of many, which oppose an effectual barrier against the reception of the doctrines of Christianity. In particular, the parable of the sower bears witness to the afflicting truth, that even when he that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man, three fourths of it are lost through the barrenness of the soil by the wayside, or on stony places, or among thorns.

But although it was thus intimated by our Lord himself, that the immediate harvest should not make a return corresponding with the pains bestowed by the husbandman, yet it had been promised of old, that the word which went forth out of his mouth should not all return unto him void, or fail to prosper in that whereunto it was

sent'. There should be at least 'an handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains,' which, by the special blessing of God should be increased at last into that 'great multitude' seen in the heavenly vision, 'which no man could number, of all nations, and kindred, and peoples, and tongues'.¹ *Other seed*, therefore, says the Evangelist, *fell in good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold*. Thus we see that nothing springs spontaneously even on the good ground, and the sower sowed there also, because the earth, even where best, can bring forth nothing without culture. All pretensions at variance with this truth must be silenced, and the universal want of that adoption into the family of God which enables us to cry, 'Abba, Father,' must be acknowledged, before those true spiritual fruits can be produced, which testify that our hopes are rooted and established in faith on Christ.

¹ Is. lv. 11.

² Rev. vii. 9.

I. If, in tracing the effects of Christ's ministry, the metaphorical language of this parable be kept in view, there will be no difficulty in accounting, on right principles, for that measure of success which actually attended it, or in ascribing the rejection of the Gospel by so large a portion of its hearers to the proper cause.

That ground which, though it needed sowing, brought forth fruit under the culture of the heavenly husbandman, was *good ground*; and herein lies the distinction between it, and all the other soils mentioned in the parable. There was a fitness for the reception of the seed. There was depth enough to retain it, and strength enough to nourish it, and warmth enough to invigorate the plant in its gradual progress towards maturity. These are very different properties from any which the ground by the wayside, or on the rock, or among the thorns, possessed. And there is quite as much distinction between the mental qualifications of those hearers of the word who are thus figura-

tively described, and that honest and good heart in which alone the fruits of the spirit are brought to perfection. Honest and good are words of comprehensive meaning. They imply a seriousness of disposition so united to a docile temper, as to exhibit the reflection and gravity of a man, tempered by the simplicity of a little child. They imply the readiness of mind with which the Bereans searched the Scriptures, joined to the enlightened attention of Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened. They imply the active and devoted service of Paul or Peter, joined to the candid integrity of Nathanael, in whom there was no guile. Above all, they imply affections zealously excited in a good thing, and an inclination to receive with meekness the engrafted word.

Such is the honest and good heart, the only soil in which the Christian graces can expand and flourish. It is humble—because it feels how far its goodness is from extending unto God, and how much there is that belongs to the unprofitable servant, even in its best services. It

is submissive—because he that is of God, heareth God's words, and receives them with implicit faith, and thankful acquiescence. It glories not in its attainments, or in its spiritual progress—because it is written, that it is God that 'maketh it to differ from another,' and that 'he resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.'

These, however, are but the preliminary dispositions, the groundwork on which the Christian character is formed; and something more is requisite, before the expected fruits can be ripened into maturity. There may be an honest and a good heart among the savage nations, and yet we do not see in them any of those connected virtues which have the promise of this world, as well as of that which is to come. They may exhibit much that is lovely and graceful, and something which almost seems like a remnant of the divine image left in the midst of moral ruin; but none of that scriptural principle which gives life and real beauty to the actions—nothing that is consistent, progressive,

habitual, abiding. Its goodness may 'endure for awhile,' but it has not that characteristic distinction of vital Christianity which its author has pointed out as essential. *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed*³.

But the believers who had Christ for their teacher, enjoyed the high privilege of knowing that Jesus was at once the author and finisher of their faith. He who originally implanted in their heart the good seed, was also pledged to watch over it with a care and culture which should only end when all was 'ripe for the harvest.' Under his fostering hand, the Apostle, called from his ordinary employment, from his ship and nets, or from the receipt of custom, grew up before him as a tender plant, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, —till the character which, in its commencing

³ John, viii. 31. Among the corruptions of falling Rome, Seneca saw enough of the transient nature of all good feelings which were founded on no higher motives than such as natural religion can suggest. He has left this lesson, *Non quid dicat, sed quid sentiat, refert; nec quid uno die sentiat, sed quid assidue.*—Epist. 9.

state, was rather promising than productive, brought forth its seasonable fruit, according to its measure of fertility, 'some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.'

Nor are these effects confined to the immediate attendants on our Lord's personal ministry. Wherever the good seed is sown in good ground, a similar process and a similar result take place throughout all ages. The 'inward man is renewed, day by day, in knowledge, after the image of his Redeemer.' If Satan be on the watch to catch the seed, he is the more concerned to frustrate his vigilance, and to disappoint his malice. If there be danger of falling away in time of temptation, he will apply the more earnestly to the source of spiritual strength for refreshment and support. If a right principle alone can sanction his actions, and hallow their tendency, he will examine the motives which influence his conduct, to see whether, like the good seed in the good ground, he have root in himself. He traces the lineaments of the Christian character in its gradual formation, and in

its different bearings. He brings forth his fruit 'with patience,' matured with many a sun, and swelled by the rain that cometh oft upon it, in opposition to the quick but unseasonable produce of the stony ground, which, like Jonah's gourd, sprang up in a night, and perished as speedily. Indeed, Scripture insists much on this particular. 'The tree planted by the rivers of water, bringeth forth his fruit *in due season*.' 'They shall bring forth fruit *in old age*.' 'I have ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that *your fruit should remain*.' . . .

A serious reflection on such texts will tend to prevent disappointment in various ways. It will teach us not to look for the works of the perfect man from the babe in Christ—to be more anxious for steady and consistent affections, than for a sudden flame, the fierceness of which, like a fire among thorns, is soon extinguished—it will teach us, finally, to aim at the gradual developement of all the Christian graces without

* Ps. i. 3. xcii. 14. John, xv. 16.

despising what is called in Scripture 'the day of small things.'

II. The Gospels show that the authoritative tone assumed by Christ often produced a partial effect in his favour.

Owing to the nature and short duration of his ministry, *impression* was the purpose which he generally consulted in his teaching⁵, and he, therefore, rested the truth of what he said on authority. This would be the more striking, when the dignity and commanding tone of his discourses were contrasted with the meanness of his rank in society. The carpenter's reputed son, whose parentage all his countrymen knew, and whose opportunities of learning had apparently not exceeded those of others in his situation, spake of Moses as a lawgiver whose precepts he had an undisputed right to explain, or extend, or abrogate at his pleasure. The traditions and corruptions of the moral law were set

⁵ Pal. Evid. vol. ii. 50.

aside without scruple by one who had not where to lay his head. To effect this purpose, his language was that of a teacher invested with absolute and decisive power. ‘*I say unto you—swear not at all.*’ ‘*I say unto you—resist not evil.*’ ‘*I say unto you—love your enemies.*’ ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *my words shall not pass away.*’ ‘*I give unto you power over all the power of the enemy.*’ ‘*I am the bread of life.*’ ‘*I am the light of the world.*’ ‘Hath no man condemned thee? *Neither do I condemn thee.*’ ‘*I give my sheep eternal life.*’ ‘Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, *for so I am*’⁶. All these expressions imply an unqualified right on the part of the speaker to teach and legislate from authority. Only the possession of such a right could warrant the use of them; and the proof of that possession was to be given at another time, and by a concurrence of independent circumstances.

The effect produced upon the people by this tone of superiority, was a sense of wonder. The

⁶ Matt. v. 33, 39, 44. xxiv. 35. Luke, x. 19. John, vi. 35. viii. 10—12. x. 28. xiii. 13.

people were astonished at his doctrine. They asked, whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works. All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth⁷. And this was precisely what might have been expected from their ignorance under the teaching of the Scribes, and the debasement of their understandings under the corruption of sin.

The effect on the avowed enemies of Christ, was a sense of awe. The officers sent to apprehend him returned with their purpose unexecuted, and declared that never man spake like this man. Some of the dwellers at Jerusalem remarked, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. As he taught in the temple, no man laid hands on him. As soon as he had said to the soldiers employed by the Jews to take him, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground⁸. Yet this involuntary homage

⁷ Matt. vii. 28. xiii. 54. Luke, iv. 22.

⁸ John, vii. 25, 46. viii. 20. xviii. 6.

paid to our Lord's personal dignity did not prevent the Scribes and Pharisees from being filled with rage at his words, and betraying that they were stung to the soul with a conviction of their justice.

On his friends the effect was of another kind. If it did not inspire them with confidence, it prepared them to entertain some hopes that he would fulfil his words; if it did not take away every remaining root of unbelief, it led them to ponder his sayings in their hearts, and remember them afterwards with profit when their expectations were realized. But it was principally what he did, and not what he said, that influenced his hearers, whether friends or foes. It was rather his miracles than his doctrine that produced conviction. The men of Nazareth did not ask him to preach to them, but to do signs. It was by the earthquake, and the things which were done, that the centurion and soldiers at the cross were constrained to acknowledge him the Son of God⁹.

⁹ Matt. xxvii. 54.

Nor could this have been otherwise, consistently with the divine decrees, since the foundation of Christ's kingdom was to be laid on the demonstration of the spirit and of power¹. It was intended, therefore, that our Lord should offer the evidence of his mission as much to the senses of the Jews, as to their understandings. Illustration and exposition were not within his immediate province. He furnished the subject of the work, and materials for it, and it became the duty of others to combine and arrange and explain, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which brought to their remembrance whatever they had heard or seen. Hence there is a sameness and simplicity in the terms used by the Evangelists when speaking of Christ's preaching, which are no longer preserved when St. Luke is describing the ministry of the apostles. When the subject relates to Christ, it is commonly said, that he came *preaching the Gospel of the kingdom*—or *teaching in the synagogue*—or, still more simply and energetically, that *he*

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 4.

spake the word. Twice it is said of him, that *he expounded to his disciples*², and once St. Mark says, that one of the Scribes had heard him *reasoning with the Sadducees*³. On the other hand, considering the unpretending style of the sacred historians, the variety of terms employed to describe the preaching of the apostles, presents a remarkable contrast to their simplicity, when speaking of their Master. Apollos *convinced*—Peter *testified and exhorted*—Paul *disputed*—*persuaded*—*confirmed* and *exhorted*—*comforted*—*reasoned out of the Scriptures*—*warned* and *showed all things*—*expounded* and *testified, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*⁴. Here there is an alternate appeal to the affections and the judgement, to the reason and to the sympathies of their hearers, which showed that the time was come for enlisting in

² Mark, iv. 34. Luke, xxiv. 27. In the Greek the word in the first passage is *ἐπέλκει*, in the second *διηκμύνει*. Our translators have used the word, *expounded*, in both verses.

³ Mark, xii. 28.

⁴ Acts, ii. 40. ix. 29. xiii. 43. xiv. 22. xvi. 40. xvii. 2, 17. xviii. 4, 5, 19, 28. xix. 8, 9. xx. 31, 35. xxiv. 25. xxviii. 23, 31.

the cause of Christ all the faculties of the human mind, and that his ministers were not to omit, on the one hand, any argument which could reach and soften the heart, or which could enlighten the understanding and convince the head, on the other.

But it is not by its immediate results that the effect of Christ's preaching can be properly estimated. Ages were to roll away before the spark which was then lighted should be kindled into a great fire, and make its influence to be felt wherever there are hearts to be melted into love, or delivered from error. For the real and glorious triumphs of our Saviour's ministry, we must look to the silent progress of his doctrines, gradually spreading through a wider circle, and transforming by their vital efficacy those who were by nature children of wrath, into sons of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

That the change in the world which dates its origin from the preaching of Christ, was a change from a state of great corruption to a

state of much comparative good, will scarcely be considered questionable. Every succeeding age saw a multitude of individuals, animated by new desires, and guided by new principles, whose wills and inclinations were progressively brought into subjection to a law purer and more spiritual than had ever been known before—their views enlarged; their philosophy enlightened and elevated—their pursuits directed from an unsatisfying search after present good to the attainment of everlasting happiness—their selfish feelings subdued, and a spirit of real philanthropy infused in their stead. That this process should have been carried on in individuals, without affecting the general character and welfare of nations at large, would be no less contrary to the natural order of things, than to the testimony of experience. Contrast a Christian community with an heathen community, or even with the Jewish people before our Lord's advent, and there will be no difficulty in recognizing the uniform tendency of the doctrines of the Gospel to ameliorate the condition of all classes of mankind. Their operation on society, like

their operation on the personal character, is often so defective as to disappoint our hopes, for among nations, as among individuals, the triumph of the principles of Christianity is very gradual. But wherever they have been received, there has been a sensible improvement—an improvement which, however imperfect in degree and in extent, may still be marked and felt—and which prepares the mind to conceive the happiness of that latter day, when the tree, springing from the smallest of all seeds, shall have shot forth its branches, and overspread the whole earth, so that all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

1. But, however slow and partial the effect of Christ's ministry has been, the enemies of the Gospel have never been able to draw any inference from this fact, which could be unfavourable to the pretensions of its author. On the contrary, by predicting the little success which would at first attend his doctrines,—a step

which no other teacher of a new religious system has ever ventured to take—Christ confirmed the authenticity of his own mission by the very circumstance which would have been fatal to the claims of an impostor. He did not deceive himself, or impose on others, by leading them to entertain hopes which the course of events would not finally justify. He told them without disguise, that *narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it, and that many were called, but few chosen*⁵.

It is true he promised his disciples that they should do greater works than he had done; but lest they should be elated by this assurance, he qualifies it by an open declaration that their doctrines would not be welcomed or obeyed. ‘Remember the word that I said unto you; the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.’ And again he warns

⁵ Matt. vii. 14. xx. 16.

them in still stronger terms—‘ They shall put you out of the synagogue, yea the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service⁶.’ On the supposition, therefore, that the apostles believed their Master’s words, they could not have hoped to reap popularity from the execution of their ministerial office, and if they met with sufferance, it would be acknowledged with thankfulness as a good which they had no reason to expect. So far, then, from feeling their faith shaken in consequence of the rejection of the Christian doctrines by the great majority of those who heard them, whether Jew or Gentile, they would only perceive in this fact the fulfilment of prophecy, and a strong additional confirmation of the truth of their Master. As men, they might be discouraged and dejected; but as Christians, they would rejoice in tribulations, and consider the present distress as an earnest of future glory.

⁶ John, xv. 20. xvi. 2.

For ourselves, we may learn to estimate the strength of that conviction, which could, animate men to struggle in a despised cause, not only against incidental opposition, but against foreseen and certain persecution—and to persevere, in spite of penalties and imprisonments, even unto death, in the propagation of a religion, the triumphs of which they distinctly knew it was destined they should never witness.

2. Our Lord's ministry, considered in its effects, reveals the truest source of encouragement for those who watch over the souls of others as men who must give account. It teaches them where and when to look for the reward of their work—and that though the seed be sometimes apparently 'cast upon the waters,' yet the faithful labourer will not eventually toil without a recompense.

In order, however, to prevent perpetual disappointment, we must learn to extend our views. To seek for the real harvest produced by spiritual labours, only in their immediate

and visible results, would be not less absurd than to take our measure of infinite space from that limited prospect which the mortal eye can reach, or to estimate the never ending ages of eternity by a transitory moment of present time. This, in fact, is a subject on which the ordinary calculations of human sagacity are often confounded, and on which God shows plainly, that his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways. The shortness of John the Baptist's ministry is a striking instance of the inscrutability of the divine counsels. His chosen servant, appointed while yet in his mother's womb to be his instrument, was cut off at a moment when, to all human appearance, he had but just begun to run his course. But there is a remarkable passage, John, iv. 36—38, worthy the attention of all ministers, which seems to give some insight into the plan of God's dealings in one of his most mysterious dispensations. 'He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, one

soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.' It would appear to the foolishness of human wisdom, that where much labour was bestowed, there would be a proportionate return—where the talent employed in the service of Christ was great, the effect would also be important and in large measure. But Providence has ordered, that the battle should not be always to the strong, or the race always to the swift, as men count strength and swiftness. 'The wisdom of God sees it fit that all his servants in the work of the ministry do not meet with the same difficulties, nor enjoy the same success. Some are laborious sowers, others joyful reapers; some labour all their days with little visible success; others bring in many to Christ, perhaps by a single sermon; some labour even with weariness, and reap little: others enter into their labours and reap much⁷.'

⁷ Burkitt on the New Test. p. 286.

Indeed, it often happens that God withholds his blessing for a time, in order that when the net is cast 'on the right side,' it may be clearly seen that 'the multitude of fishes' inclosed are of the Lord's giving, lest men should attribute their success to a wrong cause, and should 'sacrifice unto their own net ⁸,' and 'burn incense unto their own drag.' We are not to faint and be weary in doing our own work, though another agent may be raised up, to whom a larger measure of success and talents of greater influence may seem to have been dealt. John did not slacken in his own appointed sphere of action, though 'all men came unto Christ.' He rather mourned that the unspeakable gift of God had not been more thankfully received by his prejudiced countrymen. 'What he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth,' exclaimed the Holy Baptist, 'but no man receiveth his testimony ⁹.' And when his disciples, through their affection for their first master, were slow to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah, he took

⁸ Habak. i. 16.

⁹ John, iii. 32.

every opportunity of drawing off their attention from himself, and of magnifying the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.

But besides this, every minister who is attentive to the effects produced by his ministry, will perceive that there are ebbs and flows in his usefulness, and that the same apparent means are far from uniformly causing the same results. These fluctuations, whenever they occur, should lead him seriously to inquire whether they are in any degree imputable either to himself, or to causes over which he has any controul. They may arise, on his own part, from a diminution of zeal—from a wrong direction of labours—from a partial or imperfect distribution of the word—from remissness in securing his people's affection—or from many causes of a similar kind, which will readily occur to any attentive observer of the effects of influence rightly exerted on the human mind. Or they may arise from extraneous causes, but

yet over which it is in our power to exercise a legitimate and salutary restraint ; such, for example, as the prevalence of some local irregularity which may be remedied—some seducing example which may be removed—some ensnaring circumstances, the recurrence of which may be avoided in future by a little pains and foresight.

But there is no reason for discouragement, if after a conscientious survey of the whole case, it should appear that its peculiar symptoms cannot fairly be referred to any of these sources of disorder. Our Lord's own ministry was itself subject to such interruptions, owing to the waywardness of his hearers. At his first entrance upon his office, all flocked around him¹. Yet we speedily find him appealing to his own personal attendants, amid the desertion of the rest of the world, whether they also would go away².

¹ Matt. iv. 25.

² John, vi. 67.

There is also abundant proof that St. Paul, whose labours as an apostle were more blessed than any of his fellow-workers, met with many cases of defection, even among those who at first heard him gladly. He expostulates warmly with some of the Galatians who ‘did run well,’ but had been ‘bewitched’ in suffering themselves to be led away again from the faith in which they had been instructed. ‘My temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth ³?’ Passages of the Epistles also show

³ Gal. iv. 14—16. This is a remarkable passage, and almost seems to contain a clue to the meaning of the *thorn in the flesh*, of which the Apostle complains. None of the explanations given of it by the commentators are satisfactory. Those who explain it of the natural infirmity of man in his fallen state, to which St. Paul was subject in common with others, do not seem to advert to the form of expression used in this passage. The Apostle does not say, ‘the temptation

that even among the earliest churches which were formed, there were some who made ship-

which was *in the flesh*,'—but '*in my flesh*.' And why should the Galatians 'despise' him for a weakness from which they were not exempt themselves? Those who are of opinion that it was some defect in his speech which impeded his utterance, or rendered it ungraceful, appear to forget that, at Lystra, they called Paul Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. It is more probable that it was some external blemish in his person, which rendered him contemptible in the sight of the multitude, and was thus likely to injure his usefulness. And if this be granted, there are some reasons for supposing that his eyes may have been affected with weakness, or some involuntary movement—perhaps the remaining and judicial effect of the dazzling light which shone round about him as he was journeying to Damascus, and which we know actually deprived him of sight altogether, during the space of three days. This hypothesis will give a rational meaning to the proof of the love of the Galatians towards him, instanced by the Apostle, for the explanation of which the quotations usually brought forward, (*Ni te plus oculis meis amarem*, &c.) are quite irrelevant. '*I bear you record, that if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me.*' How would such an action be any proof of love, unless the supposed gift had been intended to supply some deficiency in that feature under which the Apostle was known to labour. But it would have been indeed a great token of attachment if the Galatians could have remedied his natural failing, by depriving themselves of the faculty of sight to restore it to him.

We may also account on the same supposition for another peculiarity in St. Paul's history. It is known that he always

wreck of their faith, and drew back unto perdition. Two, of whom particular hopes seem

employed an amanuensis, for which no better reason has been assigned than the assertion, unsupported by any proof, that the Apostle was unable to write the Greek characters. But was it likely that one on whose education no expense was spared, should have remained ignorant of a language so necessary to a Jew of liberal birth, especially at a time when many Greeks came yearly to Jerusalem for commercial or religious purposes. Besides, he twice quoted passages from Greek poets, which proves a certain familiarity with their writings. Now if we suppose that his eyesight was affected, all the difficulty vanishes, and an intelligible reason is suggested for his requiring the aid of an assistant.

Again, when the High Priest Ananias ordered Paul to be smitten, he retorted on him, as upon an ordinary Pharisee—God shall smite thee, thou whited wall—but when informed who it was that had spoken, he excused himself by saying, *'I wist not that he was the High Priest.'* The commentators account for his ignorance in various ways, but they leave the great difficulty untouched, since the seat and dress of the High Priest would have been sufficient evidence of his dignity in the eyes of a Jew, if eyes he had. But if St. Paul's infirmity prevented him from *seeing* the position in the council, or the external emblems of office which indicated the high station of the speaker, a clear solution of the mystery is provided, and the validity of the Apostle's apology for his hasty expression may be admitted by us, as, from the silence of the sacred historian, it seems to have been by the assembly. Acts, xxiii. 1—5.

To strengthen the hypothesis which has been advanced, I remark, lastly, that it serves to explain the expression $\pi\eta\lambdaικ\alpha$

to have been entertained, are mentioned by name. 'All they which are in Asia are turned away from me, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes⁴.' Ecclesiastical history abounds

γράμματα, Gal. vi. 11, which, it is observable, occurs in the same epistle with the passage which has given occasion to this note. McKnight on the passage, remarks, that Beza, Le Clerc, Beausobre, Wolf, and Lardner, agree with our translators in rendering the words '*how large a letter*,' and he follows their version. At the same time he allows that Whitby, Doddridge, and others, following Jerome, Chrysostom, and Theophylact, translate the words, '*with what kind of letter*,' supposing it to be an apology for the inelegance of the writing. This is beneath the seriousness of the occasion, and the character of the writer, as well as inconsistent with the spirit of the passage. May not the words be interpreted with more propriety by referring them to the *size* of the letters, which, if St. Paul laboured under the infirmity I have supposed, would be of a *larger character* than is customary, and the unusual trouble which he took on this occasion, by writing with his own hand, notwithstanding the defect in his vision, with which the Galatians were well acquainted, would show his anxiety for their faith, and the importance he attached to the subject of his letter.

Some apology is perhaps due for so long a note on a subject of no practical utility. But nothing which may tend to throw light, in however humble a degree, on a passage of Scripture which has given rise to some discussion, can be deemed wholly useless.

⁴ 2 Tim. i. 15.

with instances of similar apostacy. May they serve as warnings!

3. We may trace in Christ's ministry some of the sources of that influence which is granted to the faithful labours of the clergy.

There is, indeed, abundant reason for thankfulness that the days are over, when the clergy held dominion over the temporalities of the world, as well as over God's spiritual heritage. That dominion was not so much the legitimate ascendancy of character, as the despotic supremacy of exclusive knowledge over ignorance, and its associate, error. It was rather the offspring of a monopoly of learning in an age of darkness, than the fair superiority acquired by talent and virtue in a field of open and honourable competition. Voltaire has remarked that the ninth century was the age of the Bishops, as the eleventh and twelfth were of the Popes. And 'the superstitious reverence for the priesthood, and a credulity that seemed to invite im-

posture⁵, which, according to the historian of those ages, were the characteristics of the unenlightened devotion of that time, seem to have been carried to such a pitch as to justify the observation. That spell is now broken, and, as it frequently happens, we are threatened with a reaction of feeling which may be still more dangerous to the interests of the community, than the former error.

Yet if this alienation of sentiment from a particular religious body were the natural consequence of ecclesiastical usurpation, the church of Christ must not forget, that it has a right to challenge respect and influence, of a more legitimate and beneficial nature, on scriptural grounds. All the ministers of our own branch of that church have been solemnly charged so to sanctify the lives of themselves and of their families, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that they may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the

⁵ Hallam's Hist. of the Middle Ages, ii. 200, 222.

people to follow. They cannot overlook the highly interesting fact, that on the influential character of that body to which they belong, the moral constitution of society, as well as the more direct interests of religion, vitally depend.

Nor is this general principle affected by particular exceptions. There will always be many individuals in the ministry wholly unequal to the responsibility of giving a tone to public opinion, and regulating the standard of morals,—but in a large and comprehensive view, there will be a sure, though not always immediate, or even obvious result, corresponding with the nature of the impression given to the community by their spiritual directors. As an acute observer of human nature has observed—‘It ever was and ever will be true, in all nations, under all manners and customs—no priesthood—no letters, no humanity—and reciprocally again, society, laws, government, learning,—a priesthood⁶.’

⁶ Bentley's Remarks on a late discourse on Freethinking, Part II.

A principal source of this influence arises from the honour which God sees fit to confer on the dispensers of his word and sacraments. He permits the distribution of his mercies to pass through their hands, as in feeding the five thousand, Christ gave to his disciples that they might communicate to the multitude. He could supply his people himself with spiritual sustenance, but, in his ordinary operations at least, he chooses rather to divide the bread of life among them by means of the constituted stewards of his mysteries. Undoubtedly he also conveys the knowledge of himself by the direct ministration of his Holy Spirit—but he *generally* prefers to employ the agency of his ministers. Thus he could have conveyed immediately to the mind of the Æthiopian eunuch the true meaning of Isaiah's prophecy, but he rather chose to send Philip to enlighten him by oral instruction. The same observation also applies to the case of the Centurion and St. Peter. And, now that immediate revelations of God's will have ceased, it is by his written word that

we are instructed, through the medium of those 'earthen vessels,' which are set apart for the keeping of the heavenly treasure. They must, therefore, take heed not to 'teach for doctrines the commandments of men,' but to declare with faithfulness and authority—*Thus saith the Lord God.*

But, again, the moral weight of the clergy, in their several spheres, arises above all, under the divine blessing, from the holiness of their lives. It was in part the personal holiness of our Lord, as contrasted with the hypocrisy of the Scribes, which enabled him to speak as one having authority. And had the enemies of St. Paul found aught to object against the purity of his life, he would not have been brought before four successive tribunals, to defend himself merely from the frivolous charge of being 'a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes'.⁷

And, if the policy of a mere worldly wisdom could teach Pagan philosophers to require

⁷ Acts, xxii. 26. xxiv. 5.

virtue in an orator, how much more strongly does the Gospel require of a preacher, that 'he should behave himself holily, justly, and unblameably among them that believe^s.' The canons of the primitive church—documents valuable for the light they throw on the manners of the first ages of Christianity—interdict all who had done public penance from admission to holy orders. And if a rule so rigid evinces the value which the Fathers attached to the irreproachable lives of the clergy, enough may be gleaned from the scanty notices of ecclesiastical history to testify the wisdom of their judgment, and to show the veneration and authority with which man is invested, even in his fallen state, by sanctity of character. One early instance occurs in the title given to an Apostle on account of his virtues, by a people whose prejudices were violently opposed to the principles on which those very virtues were founded. Josephus himself does not scruple to confess his conviction, that the distress which fell upon his

^s 1 Thess. ii. 10.

nation in the destruction of their city, was a penal judgement for the martyrdom of James the Just. *For, says the historian, the Jews slew him, though a very just man.*

Another enemy of Christianity, and one who knew it well, as he had once been enlisted under its banners, affords his testimony to the same truth. The Emperor Julian attributed so much of the success of the Gospel to the strict lives of its clergy, that he gives direction in two of his epistles, respecting the serious tempers and deportment of the heathen priests, referring to the conduct of the Christian pastors for an example of the policy he recommends to Paganism. There is no testimony to the beauty of true holiness more impressive, than that which is thus borne by the involuntary awe excited by it in those who, while they approve its excellence, hate what they are constrained to admire. Herod, from a full conviction that 'John was a just and holy man, feared him.' It is a glorious trophy raised to

religion, when the adorning display of Christian graces is such as to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and to engage the esteem of those who are condemned by it. No greater tribute was ever paid to the constraining influence of the doctrines of the cross, than when it was remarked of some of the primitive believers—‘See how these *Christians* love one another.’ They were all preachers, as it were, by the spirit which they evinced, and doubtless won over many, by the silent energy of their example, to exclaim—We will go with you, for we perceive that ‘God is in you of a truth.’

But in tracing the sources of an effective ministry, care must be taken not to attach too much importance to secondary causes. It should never be forgotten that ‘all honour cometh of God,’ and that it is he alone that gives the increase. Except the Lord keep the souls of his people, the watchman warneth but in vain. ‘Behold,’ saith he to each of his humblest ministers, as of old to the angel of the church of

Philadelphia, ‘*I have set before thee an open door*’.

There is also a danger of another kind, to which the clergy, as a body, are peculiarly exposed. Though, by the divine command, they are to be patterns to the world of the rule and doctrine of Christ, yet their duties must not be performed solely for the sake of setting an example. Influence is desirable for a clergyman, as one of the talents which may be successfully used for the salvation of souls. But it must not be so sought as if it were mistaken for the end of his being. It is nothing more than one of the instruments for his work, by which he is to build up his people in Christ, and stablish them in the faith. Ministers therefore who enjoy the love of their flock, must be cautious lest they obstruct the glorification of their heavenly Father, by becoming too exclusively the idols of their charge. Their influence, although at first productive of much seeming religious obe-

dience, will cease after a time to have the same effect, if it flow from a love of the individual, rather than from a sense of the service which God requires on his own account. It is written for our instruction, that 'Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada the priest,' but after the death of his teacher and guide, 'he hearkened unto the princes of Judah.' And even had sacred history been silent respecting his subsequent declension from the paths of virtue, other instances are but too frequent of unstable men who have forsaken 'their first love,' when the cause has been removed which kept them for a time in the 'form of knowledge,' and the outward semblance of obedience. But, as it is natural for those who have benefited by a ministry to love the instrument by which a good work has been wrought in their hearts, advantage should be taken of that love to elevate and fix it on its proper object. When men's eyes are fastened on the earthly agents, they should

¹ 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 17.

be directed to transfer their affections to him who gives the blessing on their labours. They should hear, as from the mouth of Peter, 'Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power of holiness we had made this man to walk²?' After the manner of Paul at Lystra, the people should be restrained that they 'do not sacrifice unto us,'—men of like passions with themselves,—but be led to 'turn from these vanities unto the living God³.'

It is a disinterestedness of this kind, and an abstraction from personal feeling, which can alone give a ministry its proper direction and its due effect. The operating motive must be drawn from Scripture, and formed on the obligations of duty, for it is only by attention to the principle on which actions are performed, that vital religion can be preserved. And on this point, as on every other essential particular relative to the Christian ministry, that principle which ought to be the regulating motive stands

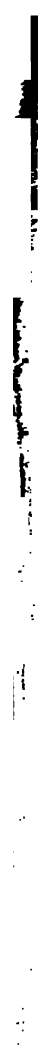
² Acts, iii. 12.

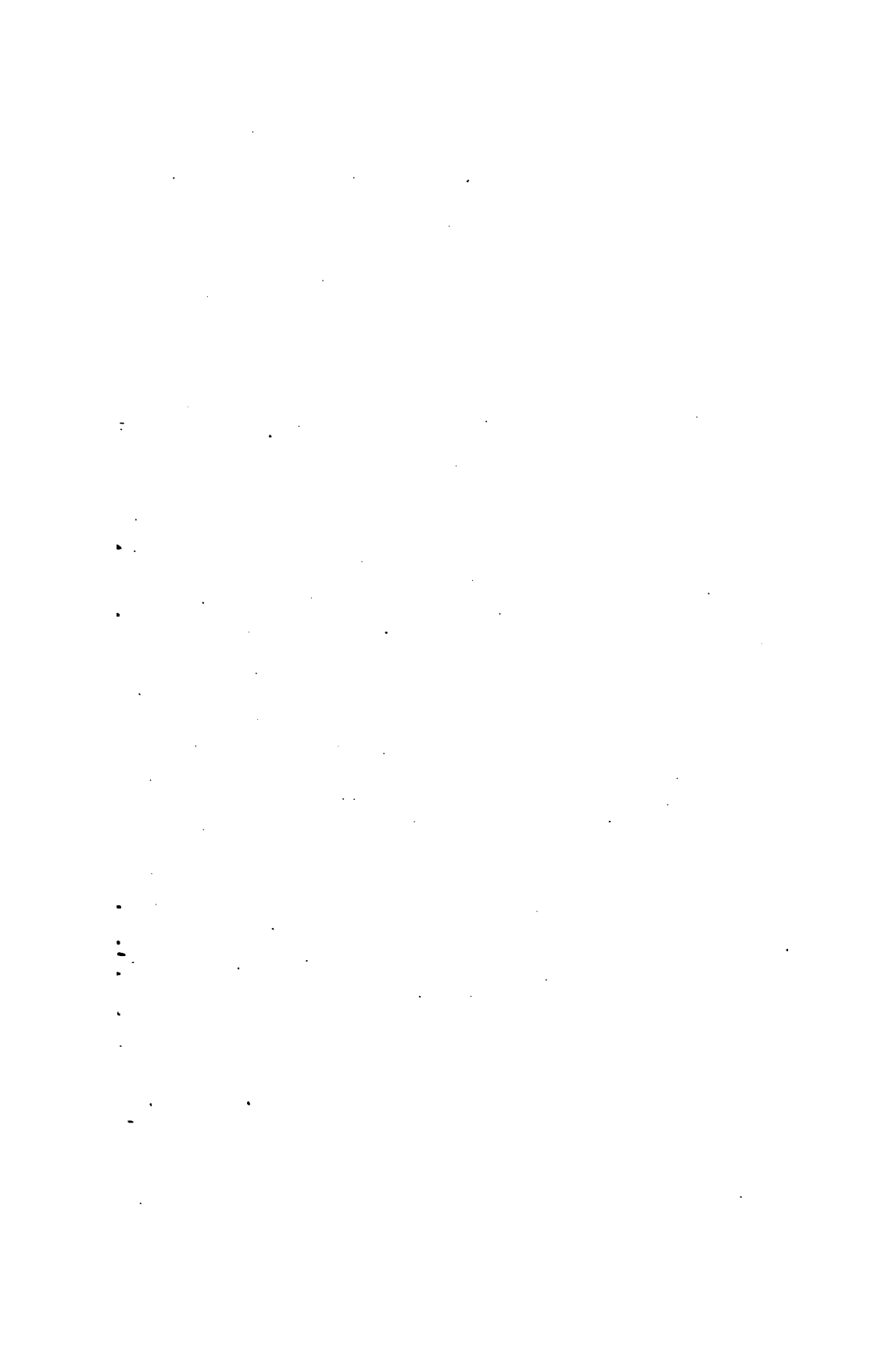
³ Acts, xiv. 15—18.

exhibited so plainly, by example as well as precept, in the life and doctrines of the divine Prophet of the church, that it cannot be mistaken—*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

THE END.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.





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